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The Trail of Conflict*

A MODERN ROMANCE OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE IN EAST
AND WEST

By Emilie Loring

Author of "The Key to Many Doors," etc.

THE people who figure in this story are—

Peter Courtlandt, master of Courtlandt Manor, not a success as a business man, but a great success as father of—

Stephen Courtlandt, overseas veteran, lawyer, nephew and idol of—

Nicholas Fairfax, known as Old Nick, owner of Double O Ranch, who is determined to secure for the boy the happiness his own life has lacked. Old Nick's physician is Doc Rand, and his neighbor is—

Bruce Greyson, of the X Y Z, who was at one time engaged to—

Geraldine Glamorgan, known to her intimates as Jerry, who believes in the sacredness of contracts, particularly marriage contracts, and who is the daughter of the oil king—

Daniel Glamorgan, one-time coal-picker, whose great obsession is to secure a back-

ground of "family" for his grandchildren. His younger daughter is—

Peggy, with whom—

Tommy Benson, book-lover and secretary at the Double O Ranch, falls violently in love. He was overseas with young Courtlandt, as were—

Nelson, division superintendent, and—

Carl Beechy, who was top-sergeant in the same company. Beechy becomes entangled with—

Ranlett, the disgruntled manager of the Double O, and—

Philip Denbigh, who is married to—

Felice Peyton, an old-time sweetheart of Stephen Courtlandt. At the time when the story opens Phil is working as range-rider for—

Jim and Nell Carey of Bear Creek Ranch.

Under blue skies, in the shadow of snow-

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crowned mountains, over emerald-green fields, across frothing streams, through the breezes from a thousand foot-hills, move cowboys, Mexicans, section heads, railroad men, horses, cattle, coyotes, and—the stork.

I

"THAT is your ultimatum, Glamorgan? My boy for your girl, or you scoop up my possessions and transfuse them into yours?"

Peter Courtlandt tapped the arm of his chair nervously as he regarded the man who sat opposite in front of the fire.

The two men were in striking contrast. Courtlandt seemed a component part of the room in which they sat—a room which, with its dull, velvety mahogany, its costly Eastern rugs, its rare old portraits and book-lined walls, proclaimed generations of ancestors who had been born to purple and fine linen. He was spare and tall. His features might have served as the model for the portrait of Nelson in the Metropolitan Museum. His eyes were darkly luminous—the eyes of a dreamer; his white hair curled in soft rings over his head; his hands were long and patrician.

Glamorgan was built on the Colossus plan—large head, heavy features, into which the elements had ground a dull color, a huge body without the least trace of fat. Only his eyes were small. They looked as if they had been forgotten until the last moment, as if the designer had then hastily poked holes beneath the Websterian brows to insert two brilliant green beads.

He was a handsome man in a clean-souled, massive way. Moreover, he looked to be a person who would crash through obstacles and win out by sheer persistence.

He flung the remains of his cigar into the fire as he answered Courtlandt. With the cushion-tipped fingers of his large hands spread upon his knees, he bent forward and fixed his interrogator with his emerald gaze.

"That statement sounds raw, but it's true. For some time I've been playing my cards for what you call a scoop. Fifty years ago my mother brought her family from Wales to this country. We had come from the coal region. Coal was all that the older children knew, so we drifted to Pennsylvania. Until I was seventeen I picked coal. Occasionally I saw the stockholders who came to inspect the mines. One day your father brought you. You passed me as if I was a post, but right then and there I learned the difference between mere

money and money with family behind it. That day I laid my plans for life. I'd make money—Lord, how I'd pile it up! I'd cut out the common dissipations of my kind, I'd marry the most refined girl who'd have me, and I'd have one of my children, at least, marry into a family like yours. My grandchildren should have ancestors who counted!

"Well, I got the girl. She had good Virginia stock behind her. Geraldine was born, and after five years Margaret, and then my wife died. I began to pile up money. I denied myself everything but books, that my girls could be fitted to fill the position I was determined they should have. I—"

Peter Courtlandt's clear, high-bred voice interrupted. There was a trace of amusement in his tone.

"Did you never think that your daughters might develop plans of their own? That they might refuse to be disposed of so high-handedly?"

"Margaret may, but Jerry won't. Since she was a little thing she's been brought up with the idea of marrying for social position. She knows that my heart is set on it. Why, I used to visit her at school dressed in my roughest clothes, that the difference between me and the other fathers would soak in thoroughly. Oh, well, smile! I acknowledge that the idea is an obsession with me. Every man has some weak point—that's mine. I'll say for Jerry that she never once flinched from owning up to me as hers. I've seen the color steal to her eyes when I appeared in my rough clothes, but she'd slip her hand into mine, for all the world as if she was protecting me, and introduce me to her friends. The girls and teachers loved her, or she couldn't have got away with it. Her friends were among the very best at college. Oh, she'll marry to please me! Even if she didn't want to, she'd do it to give Peg a chance; but I know she won't go back on her old dad. Besides, Courtlandt, I have a firm conviction that a person can put through any worthy thing on which he is determined. How else do you account for the seeming miracles men got away with in the war? The test is, how much do you want it? I've gone on that principle all my life, and it's worked, I tell you, it's worked!"

He waved away the box of cigars Courtlandt offered and pulled a dark-hued, vicious-looking specimen of the weed from his

pocket. He stuck it between his teeth before he resumed.

"After I left the coal-mines I beat it to Texas, got an option on land there, and began to make my pile in the oil-fields. I worked like a slave all day, and studied at night. I didn't mean to give Jerry cause to be ashamed of her dad when she did land. Then I set my lawyer to looking up the affairs of the Courtlandt family. I found that you had a boy, handsome, up-standing, and decent. I had him well watched, I assure you; I wasn't throwing Jerry away on a worthless young man, even if I was stuck on your family. I found also that your money was getting scarcer than hen's teeth. I took the mortgage on this house, on every piece of property in your estate. I knew when the boy chucked his law course and went into the army. I had him watched while he was overseas, and I know that he came through that seething furnace of temptation unscathed. On the day your boy marries my girl and brings her to this house to live, I'll turn your property over to you free and clear. It is in fine condition and will give you a handsome income. It won't be sufficient for you and the young people to live as I want you to, but I'll take care of that. You've known me now for three months. You know that I'm absolutely on the level in my business dealings. What say?"

Courtlandt rose impetuously and stood with his back to the fire, one arm resting on the carved mantel.

"Good Lord, man, I'm not the one to say! It isn't my life that's being tied up. This property can go to the—"

He stopped, and looked about the beautiful room. He stared for a moment at the portrait of a seventeenth-century Courtlandt which hung opposite, then up at the beautiful face of a woman in the painting set like a jewel in the dark paneling above the mantel. Her eyes looked back at him, gravely, searchingly. His voice was husky as he added quickly:

"Well, I'll talk with Steve to-night, and if he—"

Glamorgan nodded approvingly.

"I'm glad you named him Stephen. It was Stephanus Courtlandt whose estate was erected into the lordship and manor of Courtlandt by William III, wasn't it? You see I know your family history backward. I never buy a pig in a poke!" with rough frankness.

Glamorgan rose and stretched to his great height. The man watching him thought of the Russian bear which had roused and shaken himself with such tragic results.

"Why don't you and Steve run into town to-night and have supper with Jerry and me after the theater?" he suggested.

"Thank you," replied Courtlandt. "If Steve has no engagement, we will."

Glamorgan thrust his hands deep into his pockets and glowered at the man by the mantel.

"I'll leave you now to deal with him. You might mention to Steve the fact that if he refuses my offer I shall foreclose within forty-eight hours."

The blood rushed to Courtlandt's face as if it would burst through the thin ivory skin. He touched a bell. His voice was cold with repression as he answered the other man's threat.

"I'll talk with Stephen this evening. Judson, Mr. Glamorgan's coat," he added, to the smooth-haired, smooth-faced, smooth-footed butler who answered the ring.

The big man paused a moment, his little green eyes flames of suspicion.

"You'll let me hear from you to-morrow? No shilly-shallying, mind—a straight yes or no!"

"A straight yes or no to-morrow it shall be, I promise you, Glamorgan. Good night! Judson, when Mr. Stephen comes in, ask him to come to me here."

After his guest had departed Courtlandt snapped off the lights and plunged the room in darkness save for the soft glow from the blazing logs. He sank into a wing chair before the fire, and rested his head on his thin hand.

What a mess he had made of things! He had lost his inheritance, not through extravagance, but because he had not been enough of a business man to steer his financial ship clear of reefs during the last years of swiftly shifting values. To have the Courtlandt property swept away, the Courtlandt name disgraced! It was impossible. He didn't care for himself, but for Steve and Steve's children.

No—he was a liar! He did care for himself. It would break his heart to have this old home, which had been the Courtlandt manor-house, fall into the hands of an erstwhile coal-picker. The town house was different. The location of that had

followed the trail of fashion, and it had no traditions; but this—

He rose and paced the floor. Then he returned to his old place before the mantel and listened. There was the sound of whistling in the hall—virile, tuneful, the sort that brings a smile to the lips of the most sophisticated. "The whistling lieutenant," Courtlandt remembered Steve had been called in the army. He dropped his head to his extended arm and stared unseeingly down at the flame. What would he say—

"Hello, Sir Peter! Fire-worshiping?" a clear voice called buoyantly. "You're as dark in here as if you expected an air-raid. Let's light up and be cheerio—what say?" The speaker pressed a button and flooded the room with soft light. "Judson said you wanted me. Shall I stay now or come back when I've changed?"

The elder Courtlandt straightened and looked at his son with the appraising eyes of a stranger. He regretfully admitted to himself that the boy looked older than his twenty-seven years. He was tall and lean and lithe, with not an ounce of superfluous flesh on him. He stood with his feet slightly apart, a golf-bag dragging from one arm, his other hand in his coat pocket. His black hair had a rebellious kink, his eyes were dark blue, his nose clean-cut, his lips and chin hinted at a somewhat formidable strength of purpose.

Courtlandt's courage oozed as he regarded those last features.

"I—I merely wanted to ask you to give me this evening, Steve," he said. "I—I—well, there's business to be talked over."

The son looked back at his father. A slight frown wrinkled his broad forehead. He started to speak, then lifted the golf-bag and went toward the door.

"The evening is yours, Sir Peter."

His father listened till his whistle trailed off into silence in the upper regions. His dark eyes clouded with regret. It was ominous, perhaps, that Steve had adapted his selection to dirge tempo.

II

As father and son smoked and drank their coffee in front of the library fire, after dinner, Peter Courtlandt found it still more difficult to approach the distasteful subject. He talked nervously of politics, labor conditions, and the latest play. His son watched him keenly through narrowed lids.

Steve emptied and filled his pipe thoughtfully as he waited for a break in his father's flood of words. When it came, he dashed in at once.

"What's the business you wanted to talk with me about, Sir Peter? Fire away, and let's get it over. Anything wrong?"

The elder man bent forward to knock the ashes from his cigar. The gravity of Steve's "Sir Peter" had moved him curiously. It was the name by which his wife had called him, and which the boy had adopted when he was too grown-up to say "daddy."

Silent seconds lengthened into minutes as he sat there. The quiet of the room was subtly portentous. There was a hint of unsteadiness in his voice when he finally spoke.

"It's all wrong, I'm afraid, Steve," he said. "Everything we have is mortgaged to the gunwales."

"But I thought—"

The end of the sentence was submerged in stunned amazement.

"That we couldn't go broke? Well, we have. We lose everything we have tomorrow, unless—"

Peter Courtlandt dropped his head on his hand.

"Unless what?" prompted Steve.

Courtlandt leaned his white head against the back of his chair and looked at his son with haggard eyes.

"Unless—unless you marry Daniel Glamorgan's daughter."

"What?"

The exclamation brought Steve Courtlandt to his feet. The color surged to his dark hair, then ebbed slowly back again. His lips whitened.

"Look here, Sir Peter, you don't know what you're saying! You've forgotten that we are living in the twentieth century. Marry Glamorgan's daughter! I've never seen her. I didn't know the old bounder had a daughter. What does he know about me? I've never spoken to him more than twice, and then when I couldn't help it. I don't like him. He's—"

"Sit down, Steve. Stop raging up and down the room. I want to tell you all about it."

The younger man flung the cigarette he had just lighted into the red coals and dropped into a chair. He kept his eyes on the fading, flaring lights of the fire as his father told of his interview with Glamor-

gan. The muscles of his jaw tightened and his blue eyes smoldered as he listened.

"What sort of a girl would let herself be traded like that?" he demanded, when his father paused.

"That is for you to find out, Steve. When that Welshman made his astounding proposition, I started to tell him to go to the devil, and to have Judson turn him out of the house. Then I thought of you—that I had no right to fling away your inheritance without giving you a voice in the matter. The Courtlandts have held some of the property since the first of the family came from Holland in the seven—"

"Oh, I know all about those old boys! It is what their descendant is up against that's worrying me. Have you tried Uncle Nick?"

The slow color tinged Peter Courtlandt's face.

"Yes, I've appealed to Nicholas Fairfax twice; but you know as well as I that he has never forgiven your mother and me for not letting him have you six months out of every year. He contended that as you, the only son of his sister, were to be his heir, he should have an equal share in bringing you up. Your mother and I couldn't see it that way, and so—"

"But I spent every summer there until I went overseas—and oh, boy, how I worked! While my pals were vacationing, I was ranching; and ranching under Old Nick is no vacation. I'm as capable of running the Double O now as Ranlett is. Lord, the nights I've come in so stiff that I'd fall on the bed with my boots on! I had to shoot and rope, ride and round-up, drive a tractor, know the quality of seed wheat and the grades of cattle. Nick wasn't contented with my doing things as well as his outfit—I had to go them one better. But I loved the life, and I'll confess that I love Old Nick in spite of his fool ideas."

"I'll try him once more, Steve, but—"

"I'll be darned if you will! Isn't there some other way we can raise a little money until I—"

"My boy, what can you do? What can you earn at present? I know you finished your law-course after you came out of the army, but it will be several years, as times are now, before you can more than support yourself."

"You don't think I'd touch a penny of the old coal-picker's money, even if I mar-

ried the daughter, do you?" interrupted Steve furiously. "I'd break stones in the road first! Be honest, now—what would you do if we lost this place?"

"Blow my brains out!" cried Peter Courtlandt with passionate impulsiveness. Then, as he saw his son's face whiten and his jaw set, he realized the effect of his words. "No, no, Steve—of course I didn't mean that. The Courtlandts have never been quitters, and I wouldn't break the record. Forget that sob stuff. You and I would go somewhere together, and I—perhaps I might keep younger if I had less leisure."

"When are you to give Glamorgan his answer?"

Steve seemed the older of the two now; seemed to have taken the reins into his hands.

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow? Before the girl sees me? Before she has been given a chance to decide whether the encumbrance which goes with the name and social position is worth her thirty pieces of silver?"

"Try not to be bitter, Steve. Remember that when a big man has an obsession it's in proportion to his bigness, and you'll have to admit that Glamorgan's a giant in his world. You'll have a chance to see the girl before to-morrow. Her father suggested that we should run in for supper with them to-night after the theater. I have a feeling that the daughter is willing to sacrifice herself to make the great dream of her father's life come true, just as you are willing to sacrifice yourself for me. No, don't deny it," he went on, as his son impetuously opened his lips. "I haven't lived with you for twenty-seven years without knowing some of your mental processes, my boy. If it were only myself, I'd tell Glamorgan to go to the devil; but the property will be yours after my time, and your children—"

Steve interrupted with a short laugh.

"My children! It's going some to make a mess of my life for prospective children. Take it from me, they'll keep on playing with the angels for some time yet!"

"Then don't make a mess of your life. Is—is there any other girl? Are you in love, Steve?"

Young Courtlandt thrust his hands hard into the pockets of his dinner coat.

"I've never been swept off my feet at the sight of a girl's face, if you mean that."

Before I went across, I thought that Felice Peyton—"

"Felice! But she married Phil Denbigh while you were away, and now—"

Peter Courtlandt stopped in perturbed realization of what had happened.

"And now they've separated, and Felice is cynical and hard. I know that. I never really approved of her in my heart. Her ideas, her ideals—oh, well, she hasn't any. She wouldn't recognize an ideal if it tapped her on the shoulder. Her plan of life wasn't mine, but somehow I was eternally tagging after her. Moth-and-candle stuff, I suppose!"

Courtlandt stared into the fire for a moment before he raised his head and looked at his son.

"We won't go on with this, Steve. It's taking too many chances. I'll tell Glamorgan that he can foreclose and be—"

"No, you won't—at least, not until we have met the daughter. Have you ever seen her?"

The older man shook his head.

"I'll give you a close-up of the lady," Steve went on. "Amazon variety—look at the size of Glamorgan—little eyes, prominent teeth, a laugh that would raise the dead, and oh, boy, I'll bet she's kittenish!" He glanced at the tall clock in the corner. "I'll tell Judson to have the sedan brought round. We'll just have time to array ourselves for the sacrifice, and motor to town before the theaters are out."

As Peter Courtlandt's eyes, turbulent with affection and anxiety, met his son's, Steve exclaimed, with a sporting attempt at a laugh:

"I'll bet a hat, sir, that when the lady sees you, nothing short of being *the* Mrs. Courtlandt will satisfy her soaring ambition! She won't stand for being merely Mrs. Stephen. By the way, what's the prospect's name?"

"Geraldine. Her father calls her Jerry." Courtlandt laughed for the first time that evening. "That's a great idea of yours, Steve! I hadn't thought of offering myself. Perhaps, as she only wants the name and position, she'd take me and let you off. Your mother would understand," he added, with a tender smile at the woman over the mantel.

Her lovely eyes seemed to answer his. For an instant a look of unutterable yearning saddened the man's eyes; then he straightened and looked at his son.

"But no, Daniel Glamorgan expressly stipulated that he would have you for a son-in-law, or—"

The light died out of Stephen Courtlandt's face as he muttered furiously under his breath:

"Glamorgan be damned!"

III

THE telephone in the luxurious living-room of their suite rang sharply as Daniel Glamorgan and his daughter entered. The girl looked at the instrument as if she suspected a concealed bomb in its mysterious depths, then appealingly at her father. He took down the receiver.

"Yes—all right—send them up." He replaced it with a click. His grim mouth softened into a self-congratulatory smile. "Courtlandt and his son are down-stairs," he announced. "Did you order supper, Jerry?"

"Yes, dad. The table is laid in the breakfast-room. Leon will serve it when you ring. I'll—I'll go to my room and leave my wrap."

His green eyes dilated with pride as he regarded her.

"You look like a princess to-night, my girl!"

"I feel like a princess. They're usually disposed of to a title or some little thing like that, aren't they?" she asked, with a laugh which held a sob of terror.

"Look here, Jerry! You're not losing your nerve? You're not going back on me, are you?"

She met his eyes squarely.

"I am not, dad. The fewer ancestors one has behind one, the better ancestor one must make of oneself. When I make a promise, I make it to keep. I promised you that if Stephen Courtlandt asked me to marry him, I'd say yes."

Daniel Glamorgan's eyes glistened with satisfaction.

"You have the right idea, Jerry! Here they are now," he said, as the bell rang.

"You meet them. I'll take off my wrap. I'll—"

In sudden panic the girl entered her room and closed the door behind her. She leaned against it, her heart beating wildly.

In the process of making the dream of her father's life come true, was she wrecking her own life? But he had been such a wonderful father! Besides, to be honest with herself, she had to admit that the tra-

dition and social prestige of the Courtlandt name made an alluring appeal to her.

She had envied friends at school and college for their careless references to their grandfathers. Her earliest recollection was of a room full of hot, grimy miners in a little home near the coal-fields. To marry into the Courtlandt family in America would be commensurate with marrying into a ducal house in England. She breathed a fervent prayer of thanksgiving that her father's ambition hadn't urged him to seek a foreign title for her, and that character, as well as social position, had counted with him when he selected his son-in-law.

Her shimmering wrap dropped to the floor as she crossed to her dressing-table and gravely appraised her reflection in the mirror. Was the girl staring so intently back at her fitted to preside over Courtlandt Manor?

She tested every detail of her appearance. Her orchid evening gown set off her arms and the curves of her white shoulders to perfection. Her hair was of glistening brown—brown shot through with red and gold where its soft waves caught the light. Her eyes, too, were brown—large and dark and velvety, like deep pools reflecting a myriad tiny gold stars, now that she was deeply moved and excited. Her mouth seemed fashioned for laughter. The lips were vivid and exquisitely curved, and when they smiled a deep dimple dented one cheek. Her ringless hands were slender and beautifully formed.

"Dad says that you have mother to thank for your hands," she told the looking-glass girl.

She lingered before the mirror, aimlessly moving the gold and enameled appointments on the dressing-table. She dreaded to enter the next room. Her life might be—doubtless would be—changed for all time.

She flushed, and then whitened. Perhaps Stephen Courtlandt would refuse her father's proposition. Well, it would soon be settled. Better to have the awkward meeting over as soon as possible!

She picked up a large feather fan that was a shade deeper than her gown. As she touched it, she felt armed for any contingency—not without reason, for a fan in the hands of a beautiful woman is as effective as a machine-gun directed by an expert rifleman. Jerry swept her vis-à-vis a profound curtsy.

"I'll say you'll do, Mrs. Stephen Courtlandt!" she said with gay inelegance.

The laugh still lingered on her lips and lurked in her eyes as she entered the living-room. The three men who had been looking into the fire turned. The girl's heart went out to the elder Courtlandt in a rush of sympathy—his head was so high, his face so white, his eyes so full of hurt pride. The younger man's face was quite as white, his head quite as high, but there was an aggressive set to lips and jaw, a mixture of amazement and antagonism in his eyes. Then something else flamed there which she couldn't diagnose as easily.

"He looks stunned. What did he expect—the pig-faced lady?" the girl thought contemptuously, even as she advanced with extended hand and smiled up at Peter Courtlandt.

"Mr. Courtlandt, you seem like an old friend, my father has spoken of you so often," she said in her charming, well-bred voice, which had a curiously stimulating lilt in it.

The color rushed back to his face, and the expression in his eyes changed to one of relief and honest admiration as he bent over her hand.

"I realize now how much I have lost in not accepting your father's invitation to call before. Will you permit me to present my son, Stephen?"

Jerry crushed down a hysterical desire to laugh. It was so ridiculous, the casual, pleased-to-meet-you attitude of the three persons whom her father was moving at his will about the checkerboard of life! She murmured something in which the words "a pleasure" were alone audible.

Steve acknowledged her greeting stiffly. Her eyes met his with their faint, scornful smile, which she felt masked so much. They held hers for a second before she turned to her father.

"Shall we go out to supper?"

With engaging camaraderie she slipped her hand under Peter Courtlandt's arm. The expression of his eyes when they had first met hers had won her tender heart.

"We'll let the younger set follow us," she said, laughing.

"I defy Steve to feel as young as I feel now," he returned, with a gallant promptness which delighted her.

At supper she devoted herself to him. He laughed and jested with her, and, but for his white hair, looked almost as young

as his son. Steve, a little annoyed by her persistent avoidance of himself, broke into their conversation with a banality which caused his father to look at him in amazed incredulity.

"Are you enjoying New York, Miss Glamorgan?"

Jerry regarded him for a moment from under long lashes.

"I am," she replied with a smile which made him want to shake her; "but this is not my first winter in the city. Dad and I have made our headquarters here since I grew up."

She turned to his father, but Steve refused to be ignored.

"Do you like it?"

"Like it? I love it! It's so big, so beautiful, and—and so faulty!" Her pose of indifference had fallen from her like a discarded veil, and she was all eager enthusiasm. "I—I like to be where there are many people. I should starve for companionship, not for food, in the wilderness."

Steve raised his brows and smiled unsmilingly.

"Then you believe in love?" he said.

The color burned over her face to her scornful eyes.

"He is willing to marry for money, yet he dares sneer at me about love!" she thought angrily, even as she looked up and deliberately studied him.

She laughed a gay little mocking laugh.

"Believe in love? Of course I believe in love—don't you? But what an absurd question to ask! As if *you* would champion the tender passion!"

She saw his eyes darken and his jaw set before she turned to his father. She was contrite, a little frightened. What had possessed her to antagonize him so? A poor way to begin a partnership which she had hoped would develop into a real friendship!

"Jerry, take Steve into the living-room and give us some music. Mr. Courtlandt and I will smoke here," commanded Glamorgan, as his servant, who fairly exuded efficiency, passed cigars and cigarettes.

"Perhaps—perhaps he would prefer to stay here and smoke," the girl suggested hurriedly, for the first time losing her poise. She caught a glint of challenge in Stephen's eyes, and rose. Her color was high, her breath a bit uneven, as she smiled at him with bewildering charm. "After all, why should I make suggestions? You are quite

old enough to decide what you want to do yourself, aren't you?"

"Yes—quite old enough, and quite *ready* to decide for myself!" he answered, as he stood aside for her to precede him into the living-room.

"Do you play or sing?" he asked, as he followed her to the piano.

The instrument looked as if it were loved and used. It was her turn to be a trifle scornful.

"I play and sing. Does it seem incredible that I should?" She seated herself and dropped her hands in her lap. "Shall I play for you?"

"Please." He leaned his arms on the piano and looked down at her, but his thoughts were not following his eyes. "I am not in the least musical, but we had a chap in our company overseas who could make the most shell-shocked instrument give out what seemed to us, in the midst of that thundering inferno, heavenly music. Sometimes now a wave of longing for the sound of a piano sweeps over me—a piano played by some one who loves music as much as that boy loved it. Do you know Schumann's 'Papillons'? That was one of his favorites."

For answer she played the first few bars of the exquisite thing. Once she glanced up. The eyes of the man leaning on the piano, not blue now, but dark with memories, were an ocean removed from her. It was a minute after the last note was struck before they came back to her face. He drew a long breath.

"Thank you," he said simply, but his tone was better than a paean of praise. Then the softness left his eyes. There was aggressiveness and a hint of irony in his voice as he added stiffly: "My—my father has given me to understand that you will do me the honor to marry me."

A passion of anger shook the girl. Valiantly forcing back the tears which threatened, she rose and faced him defiantly. Her slender fingers smoothed out the long plumes of her fan. There should be no subterfuge now, she determined, no cause for recrimination later!

"Your father, doubtless, has also told you that my father is willing to buy your name and social position for me with a portion of his fortune. A sort of fifty-fifty arrangement, isn't it?" she added flippantly, with the faintest flicker of her bronze-tipped lashes.

Courtlandt shrugged.

"If you wish to put it so crudely."

She took a step back and clenched her hands behind her. Her beautiful eyes were brilliant with scorn. Her heart was beating so violently that it seemed as if it must visibly shake her slender body.

"Why not?" she replied. "If we speak the truth now, it may save complications later. You know that my father wants me to marry you, and—and why. I frankly confess that I sympathize with his ambitions. I want the best of life in my associations. Your father is in difficulties of one sort—my father is in difficulties of another sort, if a lack of family background can be called a difficulty. It appears that with our help they can accommodate each other. I'd do anything for dad—he has done so much for me!"

She set her teeth sharply in her under lip to steady it. Steve's eyes were inscrutable.

"Then—then you are not afraid to marry without love?"

"Without love—love for the man I marry? No, not as long as I have no love for any other. I might love a man when I married him, but later—love comes unbidden, oftentimes undesired; and then, perhaps of a sudden, it goes the way it came, and no one can stop it. You know that yourself."

"Not if it is real love—the love of a man for the one woman," he defended.

"Is there such a thing, I wonder?" she asked skeptically.

If he felt a temptation to retaliate, he resisted it.

"Then I may conclude that you accept me?" he prompted with frigid courtesy.

"Yes, that is"—a nervous sob caught at her voice—"if you will agree to my conditions. Dad has promised me an income of a hundred thousand a year. I will keep half of it in my possession; the other half you are to have, to use as you please."

Courtlandt's eyes were black with anger, his knuckles white. He was rough, direct, relentless as he answered:

"You are indeed determined to make this a business affair; but understand now that I won't touch one cent of your cursed money! Whatever arrangement your father wants to make with you and my father is his affair and yours, but you are to leave me out of it *absolutely*. That's my condition. Do you get it?"

"Yes, I get it." She colored richly, an-

grily, then paled. Even her lips went white. "There is one thing more. I—we—this marriage is really a bargain—money for social position. Let it be only that. Need there be anything else? You must understand me—you must!" she concluded in passionate appeal.

She laid her hand on his arm. He looked down at her with disconcerting steadiness. His face was stern.

"Yes, I understand. You mean a marriage stripped to its skeleton of legal terms. No mutual responsibilities, no mutual sacrifices, no—no love. That is for you to decide. The Courtlandt debts are so great that I must accept any terms you may dictate. It shall be as you wish, I—promise."

Her brown eyes were brilliant with unshed tears as she held out an impulsive hand.

"Thank you! You make the arrangement seem bleak and sordid, but you have given me back my self-respect. Now I feel that it is an honorable bargain between us two. You are to be perfectly free to come and go as you like, and I shall be free too; but there is one thing I promise you—I shall keep the name I take unstained."

For an instant he looked down at the hand he held; then he released it.

"I knew that when you came into the room to-night. Will you marry me soon?"

"Whenever you like. Will you—say good night to your father for me? I—"

With a valiant effort to steady her lips, she smiled faintly, opened the door of her room, and closed it quickly behind her.

As father and son motored home, Peter Courtlandt was the first to break the silence. He made an effort to speak lightly.

"Well, my boy, your close-up was wrong! Geraldine Glamorgan has neither prominent teeth, nor little eyes, nor a kittenish manner. In fact, I don't know when I have seen so beautiful a girl so singularly free from the barnacles of vanity and self-consciousness."

"Kittenish!" his son repeated curtly. "She's far from kittenish. She's an iceberg, and, what's more, she has the business instinct developed to the thirty-third degree. Believe me, she's a born trader!"

IV

GERALDINE COURTLANDT slowed down her car to enter the river road. The sun had set in a blaze of crimson glory. Lights

on the opposite shore flickered for a moment as they flashed into being, then shone with steady brilliancy. Lights appeared on the few boats swinging at anchor in the quiet water. Lights in windows beacons a steady welcome to home-comers.

What individuality there was in lights, the girl thought! Those across the river seemed entirely municipal and commercial, those on the boats carried a silent warning, those shining in the windows seemed warmly human.

The turmoil in Jerry's heart subsided. She had driven miles that afternoon through the cold, exhilarating rush of December air, trying to forget Steve's tone when he had refused her offer to drive him to town that morning.

Had she been married only a month? It seemed as if centuries had passed since she and Steve had stood before the altar with their witnesses and exchanged marriage vows. She shivered. If she had realized how irrevocable they were, had understood their solemn admonition, would she have had the courage to marry to please her father, she wondered?

"And forsaking all others keep thee only unto him as long as ye both shall live?"

The question had echoed in every sound at the wedding-breakfast in her father's apartment. She had read it deep in Peggy's eyes as they had met hers from across the room. It had kept time to the revolution of the wheels as she and Steve had motored out to Courtlandt Manor in the late afternoon.

Her lips twisted in a bitter little smile as she remembered Sir Peter's tactful suppression of surprise when they had told him that there would be no wedding journey. She and Steve had decided that under the circumstances such a function would be nothing short of farcical; besides, he would not ask for leave from the office. Sir Peter had quite suddenly decided to go on a hunting-trip.

The girl's brows wrinkled in a troubled frown. She knew now that she had done a grave injustice to Steve and to herself when she consented to her father's proposition. Well, the deed was done. Her only course was to turn her mistake into a stepping-stone toward ultimate good. That was the one way to treat mistakes remedially, she had learned in her twenty-three years.

"Every engaged couple ought to have the marriage service read aloud to them at

least once a week. *That* would give most of them pause!" she murmured with fervent conviction.

She ground on her brake just in time to avoid running down a sign that read:

ROAD CLOSED—DETOUR

For a moment the black letters on the white board danced weirdly before her eyes. She must cure herself of the reprehensible habit of driving with her mind miles away.

She turned into the side road, and drove slowly. Detours were notoriously rough, even if they sometimes offered adventure, she thought whimsically.

As Jerry turned into the tree-lined avenue which led to the manor-house, the upper windows still reflected the glow in the western sky; and at the foot of the garden slope she caught the shimmer of the river. Already she loved the place. The great house had "home" writ large all over it. It bulged, it loomed, it rambled in unexpected places, as if it had grown with the family. And yet, in spite of the successive additions, it remained a choice example of early architecture. It was as if a beneficent fairy, versed in the arts, had presided over the alterations.

As the girl entered the great hall, where logs blazed in the mammoth fireplace, she had the sense of being enfolded in warm, tender arms. If Steve would not be so frigidly courteous, she could be quite happy, she thought resentfully.

At breakfast each morning during these interminable weeks he had politely asked her preference for the evening. Should they motor to town for the theater or a dance? And she, dreading to bore him more than he was already bored, and hating to face the curious eyes of his world, which had been set agog at their marriage, had no less politely replied:

"I prefer to remain in this lovely country, but please go yourself. I really shouldn't be in the least lonely."

He had always refused to take advantage of her suggestion. Every night they dined together with great formality—she in the loveliest frocks of her hastily assembled trousseau, he in correct and immaculate dinner clothes.

The only time there seemed to be the least sympathy between them was when she was at the piano, in the library, and Steve smoked in the big chair in front of the fire. He kept absolutely still, usually

with his eyes on his mother's portrait. Was he dreaming dreams, she wondered? Had there been a girl without money whom he loved? Did he know what "the love of a man for the one woman" meant? She would never forget the tone in which he had spoken those words.

She was standing in the hall, her coat off, when she thought of that. She shook herself mentally and dragged her thoughts back to the present. She spoke to her trim maid, who came to take her coat.

"Tell Judson to serve tea in the library, Hilda. I—I'm cold."

She was half-way to the fireplace in the long room before she discovered that the wing-chair in front of it was occupied—occupied by an old man of a queer, elfish type, who regarded her with a poorly suppressed snort of disdain as she paused in momentary surprise. The skin stretched over his high cheek-bones till it shone like mellowing, yellowing ivory. His colorless eyes glittered as with fever; his forehead rose to where his coarse white hair branched a sort of kewpie curl.

A black cape, of wool so soft that it looked like velvet, lay across his thin, stooped shoulders. From under its folds his hands protruded, clasped on the top of a stout ebony stick. They were gnarled and distorted with rheumatism. His voice, true to type, was high and slightly cracked as he spoke to the girl after an instant of scowling scrutiny.

"So you're the new Mrs. Courtlandt, the lady of the manor, are you? You're the girl who has been traded in to save the family fortune?"

The angry color flamed to Jerry's hair, but she stood her ground. She even managed to bestow a patronizing frown upon him.

"Now I know who you are! No one but Old Nick would be so rude. You see, your reputation has preceded you!"

She sank into the chair opposite him, and, with an elbow on its arm, her chin on her hand, regarded him curiously. She made a brilliant bit of color in the dark-toned room. The light from the fire fell on her rose-color sport suit and brought out the sheen of her velvet tam of the same shade, drooped picturesquely over one ear. It flickered fantastically on her white throat and set the diamonds in the pin which fastened the dainty frills of her blouse a gleam with rainbows. It played mad pranks with

the circlet of jewels on the third finger of her left hand.

How ill and how pathetically fragile he looked, the girl thought! She had a passion of sympathy for the old. She would ignore his rudeness. She leaned forward and smiled at him with gay friendliness.

"Now that I have guessed who you are, it's your turn. Tell me how you got here. Did a magician wave his wand, and presto, an enchanted carpet? I am sorry that there was no one at the manor to welcome you. I was detained by one of those troublesome detours. Sir Peter has been away, but he returns to-night, and Steve—did Steve know that you were coming? Did—did he write to you about—about me?"

The last word was added in an undignified whisper.

"Steve! Do they ever let Steve tell me anything?"

"Now I've done it—he's off!" Jerry thought, with a hysterical desire to laugh, he was so like an old war-horse scenting battle.

"No!" Nicholas Fairfax went on. "The first I knew of you was when Peter Courtlandt wrote that a marriage had been arranged between the daughter of Glamorgan, the oil king, and Steve. Arranged! Stuff and nonsense! What poor fool arranged it, I'd like to know? Hasn't Peter Courtlandt seen enough of life to know that when a man who has nothing marries a girl with a large fortune, he's ruined? If he has any strength of character, it turns to gall. If he's a weak brother, he gets weaker. It's hell, for a proud man! Why didn't they give me a chance to save the family fortune? I'd have done it if Steve had asked me, but I turned his father down—I wouldn't give a penny to save him. Why—why, that boy ought to have married some one who'd count, not a once-removed coal-picker!"

Furious as she was at his insult, Jerry kept her temper. It was so pathetically evident that he was old and disappointed and alarmingly ill. However, there was a hint of Glamorgan's determination in her eyes as she answered coolly:

"You may say what you like about me, but I can't let you disparage my father. He is the biggest thing in my life. After all, why should you roar at me? Steve and I are not the first victims sacrificed on the altar of family pride, are we? Sentiment is quite out of fashion. What passes for it

is but a wan survival of the age of romance and chivalry. Marriage in that stratum of society to which I have been lately elevated is like the Paul Jones at a dance. When the whistle blows, you change partners—in the same set. If one should happen to go out of it, pandemonium, quickly followed by oblivion!"

If Fairfax was conscious of the sting of sarcasm in her words, he ignored it. His voice was barbed with thorns of irritation as he said:

"Then it is as I suspected—you're not in love with Steve! So love is out of fashion, is it? To be scornful of love is the prerogative of youth; when we get old we treasure it. Well, I warn you now, young woman, that my nephew sha'n't live the loveless life I've lived. I was born rich. Had I been poor, and married; had my wife been my working partner, dependent upon me for money, helping me to climb, I shouldn't be the wreck of a man I am now!"

"What a pre-nineteenth-amendment sentiment!" the girl dared mischievously.

He glowered at her from under his bushy brows.

"You can't switch me off my subject with your flippancy. I repeat, Steve shall have love. I'll get it for him. I'll—"

He rose and brandished his stick at the girl, but fell back and leaned his head weakly against the chair. Jerry leaned over him and smoothed back his hair tenderly. He looked up at her with fever-bright eyes and gasped breathlessly:

"I haven't gone—yet! I sha'n't go till—I've thought of some way to—to yank Steve out of this—this damnable Sam Jones ring that you talk about. Give me some tea—quick! My fool doctor won't let me have anything else. What's Steve doing—living on your income?" he asked, as Judson, after fussing among the tea things, at a low word from the girl, left the room.

Jerry's cheeks flushed, and tiny sparks lighted her eyes as she countered crisply:

"Don't you know your nephew better than to ask that question? He is in a lawyer's office, working for the munificent sum of fifteen per."

Fairfax choked over his tea.

"D'you mean to tell me that a son-in-law of Glamorgan, the oil king, is an office-boy? Well, between you all, you've made a mess of it, haven't you? What does your father say to that?"

"He's—he's furious," Jerry answered, as she studied the infinitesimal grounds in her teacup.

She gave the tea-cart a little push, which removed it from between them. She rose, hesitated, then slipped to her knees before the old man. She looked up at him speculatively for a moment before she commenced to trace an intricate pattern on his stout stick with a pink-tipped finger. Her voice was low and a trifle unsteady as she pleaded:

"Uncle Nick, be friends with me, will you?"

A non-committal grunt was her only answer.

"Steve won't talk to me. He won't listen to reason. Having made his big sacrifice for the family fortunes by marrying me, he is holding his head so high that he'll step into a horrible shell-hole, if he doesn't watch out! Dad is furious that he won't live and spend money as befits a Courtlandt—that is, as dad thinks a Courtlandt should live and spend; and with that fine logic which is so characteristic of the male of the species, he takes it out on me. Steve is so—so maddening! He won't use the automobiles unless he is taking me somewhere, although all of them, except my town car and roadster, were in the garage when I came here. He just commutes and commutes in those miserable trains. Commuting corrupts good manners, and he's a—a bear! He and I are beginning all wrong, Uncle Nick!" She met the stern old eyes above her before she dropped her head to the arm of his chair. "Steve hates the sight of me, and I—"

Fairfax laid his stick across her shoulders with a suddenness and strength which made her jump.

"What did you expect? Didn't I tell you that when a poor man marries a fortune, his pride turns to gall? Can a red-blooded man really love a girl who would marry for position? You're fast getting to hate him, I suppose?" he demanded in a tone which brought her to her feet and iced her voice and eyes.

"You wouldn't expect me to be crazy about him, would you?" she returned. "He is cold and disagreeable, and is evidently laboring under the delusion that the world was created to revolve around Stephen Courtlandt." A contemptuous snort fired her with the determination to hurt some one or something. "You may take it from

me that if I had the chance to choose again between disappointing dad or marrying your precious nephew, I'd—I'd disappoint dad!"

She was breathless but triumphant as she flung the last words at him. He glared at her.

"So you're a quitter, are you?"

Jerry's face was white, her eyes were smoldering coals of wrath. Her voice was low with repressed fury as she flung back his taunt:

"I'm not a quitter; but why couldn't dad have selected some other aristocrat for a son-in-law? From what I have observed, there are plenty of them who need money. Believe me, Uncle Nick, I'm tired of living in this cold-storage atmosphere. I was willing to play fair, willing to keep my part of the contract—"

Her voice failed her as she met his grilling eyes.

"Are you fulfilling your—"

"What, Uncle Nick—tea-broken?" interrupted a voice from the door.

The old man struggled to his feet as his nephew entered the room and came toward him. A smile of tenderness dimmed the glitter of his eyes.

Jerry's heart looped the loop. How long had Steve been at the door? Had he heard that last rebellious declaration of hers? How would he greet his uncle? She hoped that he would be tender, for no matter how disagreeable Nicholas Fairfax was, he was old and evidently dangerously ill.

She was quite unconscious of her breath of relief as the younger man laid an affectionate arm about the elder's shoulders.

"This sure is a surprise and then some, Uncle Nick! Why didn't you let us know you were coming?"

"I knew that if I wrote your father would invent an excuse to put me off, so I roped Doc Rand and came along. I have no time to waste. I wanted to see the kind of girl they'd sold you to—"

"Then you have seen a fine one who did me the honor to marry me, haven't you?" There was a set to young Courtlandt's jaw which boded ill for the person who differed with him. "Why not come up to your room and rest before dinner? Sir Peter returns to-night, and you'll want—why, here he is now!"

A hum of voices in the hall drifted to the library. Jerry sprang forward with a radiant smile of welcome as Peter Courtlandt

entered the room. He seized her two hands in his and kissed her tenderly.

"It's a good many years since I had a welcome home like this," he admitted with a break in his voice. "How are you, Steve? Nick, I just ran into Doc Rand in the hall. He told me that you were here."

He held out his hand to his brother-in-law, who responded grudgingly:

"I suppose he told you a lot of other stuff, too. Well, I'll fool him!"

Jerry gave the hand that still held one of hers a surreptitious squeeze.

"It's good to have you back, Sir Peter! The house has seemed terribly big and empty without you."

"Empty!" echoed Fairfax, with his sardonic chuckle. "Fancy a bride of a month complaining of emptiness in a house without her father-in-law!"

"How does it happen that you have torn yourself away from the ranch, Nick?" interrupted Peter Courtlandt, before Steve, who had grown white about the nostrils, could speak. "The last time you came to see us you said you would never leave it again."

Fairfax swallowed the bait which never failed to lure him. His Western possessions were his pride, and he welcomed an opportunity to talk of them much as a fond parent does of his child.

"Didn't want to leave. Felt it my duty to come and see what you had done to Steve," he growled. "Greyson, of the X Y Z, is looking after things for me."

"Greyson, of the X Y Z! Is your ranch near his?" Jerry demanded.

A faint color stole to her face; her eyes were alight with interest.

"It is. What do you know about it?" returned Fairfax, whose eyes were interrogation-points of suspicion.

"Not much. I met Mr. Greyson last winter, and I—"

"Met Greyson, did you? H-m! So that's what's the matter with him! I suppose the daughter of an oil king looked down upon—"

"Have you had a profitable year?" interrupted Peter Courtlandt, adroitly getting between his son and the old man. "They tell me that this has been a banner season for wheat."

"They told you right. If the cattle winter safe, I shall achieve the ambition of my life—to own the biggest and finest herd of shorthorns in the country. I'll show 'em a

thing or two about that breed of cattle! I tell you, Peter—"

"Mrs. Denbigh," announced Judson, at the door.

Jerry caught the look of consternation which Peter Courtlandt threw at his son. She saw also the sudden tightening of Steve's lips. What did it mean? She had met Felice Denbigh once, and had been repulsed by her super-golden hair and super-perfect complexion. Was she an old sweet-heart of Steve's?

She took a step toward the smartly gowned woman, who spoke as she crossed the threshold.

"Mrs. Courtlandt," she said smoothly, "you will forgive me for this intrusion on your honeymoon, won't you? But—but Steve left his gloves in my sedan this morning when we drove to town, and I came to return them."

Jerry's mind took a dizzy turn or two before it settled down to clear thinking. She had a curious sense that with the explanation Felice Denbigh had fired the opening gun of a campaign.

So there had been a reason why Steve had refused to allow her to drive him to town! She flashed a glance at him even while she murmured welcoming platitudes to her guest. He had his hand on his uncle's arm.

"You remember Felice Peyton, don't you, Uncle Nick?" he said.

"What's that? Felice Peyton, the girl you were forever running after when you were in college? Well, Miss Peyton, you lost him, didn't you?" asked the terrible old man.

"But—but, dear Mr. Fairfax, I'm not Miss Peyton now. I married Phil Denbigh when Steve deserted me and went off to the war, I—"

"Philip Denbigh!" The old man rose and straightened himself like an avenging Nemesis. "Poor devil! So he drew another blank besides that good-for-nothing, philandering mother of his—a mother who wept and begged until she kept the boy from enlisting, and by some hocus-pocus got him into Class C! No, I won't stop"—as the elder Courtlandt laid a peremptory hand on his arm. "There are a lot of men who are cringing through life to-day because their women did not love them enough to cheer them on to fight in the great fight!"

Felice Denbigh was white with anger,

her eyes were tiny green flames. Jerry flung herself into the breach.

"Won't you stay and dine with us, Mrs. Denbigh? Poor Steve must have been bored to death, surfeited with my society this last month."

"Thank you, no." Felice's self-possession was superb. "I shall pay my respects to the new Mrs. Courtlandt later, when she is formally at home. Good night, Mr. Fairfax! What a pleasure it must be for the family to have your genial presence at the manor! You don't know how happy it makes me to find that some one remembers Steve's devotion to me, for he seems to have forgotten it. Good night, Sir Peter! Stevie, will you come and start that cranky car of mine?" Then, as Stephen Courtlandt reached her side, Jerry heard her ask softly: "Shall we meet at the same place to-morrow morning?"

Nicholas Fairfax must have heard it also, for the girl heard him mutter:

"Snake!"

V

As she served coffee in the library after dinner, Jerry pondered over those low-spoken words. The firelight set the sequins on her pale blue gown glittering like jewels; it accentuated the satiny sheen of her hair and betrayed the troubled expression in her lovely eyes.

Nicholas Fairfax was in his room. He had collapsed when he went up to dress for dinner.

Dr. Rand, whom Fairfax had brought with him, stood with his back to the fire, stirring his coffee. There was a suggestion of fat and wheeze about the little man. Under his bushy white hair his weather-stained face had the wrinkled effect of a plump, elderly russet apple. His frock coat was of finest pre-war broadcloth. The flamboyant effect of his black necktie made the girl think of the bow on the neck of a pet kitten.

The doctor tested his coffee before he observed dryly:

"If a man with an underdeveloped heart-beat and an overdeveloped blood-pressure will go chasing half-way across the continent to see a pretty girl"—he bowed with somewhat ponderous gallantry in Jerry's direction—"what can you expect but collapse? He's crazy about you, Steve, and somewhere he got the fool notion that you were unhappy. That's what started him

East. I tried to hold him back. I knew the price he'd pay!"

Stephen Courtlandt came suddenly from the window where he had been looking out upon the snow-dusted world. He approached the fire. His eyes looked strained.

"Then you think he won't rally from this attack, doc?" he asked anxiously.

"It's better for you to know the truth, Steve. He knows. He's wired for Greyson, of the X Y Z, and—"

"Oh-h!"

The startled exclamation had escaped Jerry's lips before she realized that she had made a sound. A delicate pink stole to her hair as she met Steve's steady eyes. Dr. Rand, apparently, was quite unconscious of the interruption.

"And sent for your family lawyer. Your father is with him now. I'll go and relieve him. Your cook sure makes good coffee, Mrs. Jerry! Bring her out to the Double O and invite us old bachelors for eats once in a while. You'd be doing a charity bigger than some you spend your time on here, I can tell you!"

"Mrs. Courtlandt would starve for people in that wilderness, doc," announced Stephen with parrot-like glibness.

"Would she now? She doesn't look like a child who'd be so dependent on chatter. Well, the Double O isn't in the dude ranch region, neither is it exactly a wilderness. It's a seething caldron of society in comparison to some of the places. You knew that Old Nick and Greyson had given the Bear Creek Ranch to a returned service man, didn't you, Steve?" Then, as young Courtlandt nodded: "Well, he brought a wife out last spring. She doesn't have a woman to speak to, but she reminds me of a meadow-lark—little and quiet, but with a voice that sings."

"Do she and her husband live there all alone?" Jerry asked in wonder.

"Yes—that is, there's a range-rider, but—but that's another story." Had she not thought it quite out of character, Jerry would have sworn that Doc Rand was embarrassed. "We—here I am talking when my patient needs me! It's all your fault, Mrs. Jerry. You shouldn't have vamped me so outrageously. Steve, I want a prescription filled."

"I'll send Carter out for it, doc. Give it to me."

He left the room with the slip of paper in his hand. Rand looked after him, then

thoughtfully at the girl, where she sat in the flickering light of the fire. He set his cup on the tray and patted her hand gently.

"Don't mind Old Nick, child. He's sick and jealous and—and mad about Steve. It will all come right. Things have a marvelous, unbelievable way of coming right. That's what I kept telling Fairfax, but he wouldn't listen."

"Why—why should he hate me so?"

"He doesn't hate you; he's—he's just afraid for Steve, that's all. He adored his sister. He used to say that when he found a woman like her, he'd marry."

He looked up at the portrait over the mantel, and Jerry's glance followed his. The eyes, so like Steve's, were thoughtful; there was a suspicion of laughter in the curve of the lips. A string of rare pearls gleamed softly on the creamy neck.

The flesh tints of the picture were marvelously lovely. The artist had worked lovingly, and had produced a portrait that was humanly, warmly alive—a spirit that dominated the quiet room.

"Steve—Steve and Sir Peter—love her like that too, do they not?"

Rand thrust his hands under his coat-tails and flapped them in time with his heel-and-toe teeter.

"Love her! It is more than love. Betty Fairfax—the name clung even after marriage—makes me believe in immortality. The best of her is living in Steve, and it will be handed on to his children. Her spirit is just as much alive for her husband and son as it was the day she left them. That's why Steve has kept straight through temptations which would have lured most chaps of his age. No one can ever tell me, and get across with it, that a mother's influence doesn't live forever. That boy is one of a thousand, isn't he, Mrs. Jerry?"

"Oh, perhaps, as thousands go!" She looked up from under her long lashes at his discomfited face. Laughter gleamed through the tears which his tribute to the mother had brought. "You shouldn't pry into the secrets of a maiden's heart!" she teased with exaggerated demureness.

Rand responded to her mood.

"That's better! A child like you should laugh, not be as serious as you've been ever since I've seen you. Don't let Nick's condition depress you. He may live for weeks; and when he does go, it will be a release. He will welcome it if—if he can go knowing that Steve's happiness is assured."

"Is any one's happiness assured?" asked the girl gravely.

"No!" He regarded her with his twinkling gray eyes. "But I'll bet my bronco that if any one's is, it's Steve's. Good night!"

He was gone before Jerry could reply. Her heart felt curiously warmed by his words. Evidently Dr. Rand liked her, if Steve didn't.

She went to the piano. Her fingers touched the keys experimentally for a moment; then she quite unconsciously struck the opening bar of "Papillons." The music danced and rose with dainty spontaneity. She drifted into Bach's "Praeludium." Separated chords or flowing melody she played with a sympathy and sureness that showed the touch of an artist.

She knew when Steve came into the room and crossed to the window. As the last note died away, she turned. He stood motionless, with his hands clenched behind his back. What was interesting him outside, she wondered?

She wanted to speak to him, but she never yet had addressed him by his first name. It seemed absurd, it was absurd, but she had avoided using it to his face. To continue the avoidance presented difficulties now that his back was turned. She usually waited until he looked at her—which she had to acknowledge was seldom.

She ran through the opening bars of "Papillons" again, but his back remained obstinately turned to the room.

"I—you—" She halted awkwardly. "I would like to talk to you," she admitted hesitatingly.

Steve wheeled and approached the piano.

"Don't you know my name that you have to juggle with 'I—you—' when you want to attract my attention?" he demanded belligerently.

There was a defiant gleam in the eyes which met his.

"It does sound silly, doesn't it—*Stevie?*" she returned, with exaggerated demureness and an exact imitation of Felice Denbigh's voice. "But—but I know yours better than you know mine, I think." As he opened his lips to speak, she hurried on: "I wanted to ask if you were in love with Felice Denbigh. No, no, don't mistake me," she added, as his blue eyes darkened to purple-black and his lips tightened. "I'm not jealous—really I'm not. I only wanted you to know that if you are, I'm

sorry, terribly sorry. It's a tragedy to love one person and have to marry another!"

"How do you know? Are you in love with Bruce Greyson?" he asked with rough directness.

His sudden turn of the tables took the girl's breath. She colored betrayingly. She knew that she must be the picture of guilt as she stood there with her color coming and going and her heart beating like a silly tom-tom.

"I haven't seen Bruce Greyson since last winter," she evaded, with a slight unsteadiness in her voice. Then, maddened at her own lack of poise, she looked up with frank defiance. "It's a pity that he doesn't live here. He could motor me to town!"

He flushed darkly.

"My motoring to town with Mrs. Denbigh this morning was purely accidental."

"But—but you will never go with me!"

"Trolley incomes should avoid limousine ladies."

"Limousine ladies!" Jerry gripped her temper and controlled her voice. "Pardon! My mistake," she drawled maddeningly. "Is—is Mrs. Denbigh divorced?"

"Not yet. What Old Nick said about Phil's mother was true. She did ruin his life. It would have been better for him and for her had he been shot to pieces than to have him as he is now, with this gnawing shame at his heart."

"She—she was not much like your mother, was she?"

"Like mother?" Jerry thought she had never heard anything so beautiful as the word "mother" as Stephen Courtlandt uttered it. He smiled up at the portrait. "Mother was—well—" He cleared the huskiness from his voice and went on: "As I was saying about Denbigh, remorse got too much for him, and a year ago he disappeared—dropped completely out of sight."

"Why didn't Felice go with him?"

"Do you know, I fancy that Phil didn't want her."

"Nevertheless she had married him. One doesn't take the vow about 'forsaking all others' to break it, does one?" she said gravely.

"I infer from your question that you do not believe in divorce?"

"Divorce! While I acknowledge that there may be situations where it is unavoidable, I hate the word. Always, to me, it takes on the semblance of Medusa's head

in my school mythology, its snaky, hissing locks striking, stabbing, stinging, scarring indelibly. I believe in keeping covenants."

"It's hard sometimes."

"Very, but life isn't intended to be all joy-ride. I've found that out."

"You mean—"

"Nothing that need make you glower at me like that. Do you know," she went on, with an exact imitation of his earlier voice and manner, "I fancy that the future first families of America will be those who can count back at least four generations of ancestors who have, in spite of disappointment and disillusion, poverty or riches, sickness or health, kept their marriage covenants. A curious idea, isn't it?"

Courtlandt thrust his hands hard into the pockets of his dinner coat. The atmosphere tingled with electricity. The girl wondered if he was throttling a desire to shake her. She hoped so.

He met her eyes steadily for a moment before he turned to leave the room. Jerry took a hasty step after him.

"Wait, please, if—if—" As he kept on, she added desperately: "Steve, *please!*"

He stopped and turned.

"If—if you should see dad," she said, "please do not mention the fact that Bruce—that Mr. Greyson's ranch is near your uncle's."

"Why not?" he inquired relentlessly.

"Because in an attack of homesickness last winter I became engaged to him."

VI

IN the music-room at Courtlandt Manor the rugs had been rolled back, the voice of the phonograph released from captivity, and the guests were dancing—at least, some of them were.

Sir Peter had beguiled Glamorgan to the library for a smoke. The oil king had cast a gloom over the dinner. Was it because he was disturbed about Nicholas Fairfax, Jerry wondered? To the amazement of all, he and the ranchman had become great friends. It would be like her father to be irritable if he were moved.

Perhaps it had been the arrival of Greyson which had infuriated him. Last winter he had quickly made her see the folly of her engagement to the ranchman, and now she was grateful to him. She had known, even at the time, that she did not love Bruce Greyson, and that she was merely in love with love. In a way, her life had been

a lonely one, and when he pleaded with her to marry him she agreed to a tentative engagement. Now she was glad that she had kept him at a distance, even in those two weeks.

She looked up at Greyson as he sat beside her in one of the deep window embrasures. A distinguished-looking man, he gave the impression of having lived in great spaces, of having achieved worth-while things, of being absolutely poised and self-assured. His dark hair was tending toward neutral at the temples, and his keen blue eyes had fine lines radiating from them, which denoted long-distance gazing. The weather-beaten texture of his skin was emphasized by the immaculate white of the shirt and collar of his up-to-the-minute dinner clothes.

Peggy Glamorgan, as she danced with her brother-in-law, was doing direful things to the heart of young Don Curtis, whose family estate adjoined the manor. She was very lovely—a younger replica of her sister, except that where Jerry's eyes were brown Peggy's were a somewhat elfish hazel. She was making the most of a week-end freedom from school discipline.

Steve Courtlandt's glance wandered to the two in the deep window. Peggy looked up at him with tormenting concern.

"That's the second time you've lost step, Steve. I hate being trodden on!"

Her laughing eyes and mischievously curved lips robbed the words of their sting.

"I'm sorry! Give me one more trial, Peg-o'-My-Heart, and I'll do better," promised Steve.

He had taken an immense liking to the girl, she was so genuine, so unaffected, so brimming over with the zest of living.

"Nothing doing, brother! Go get Jerry. It's a part of her job to put up with your poor dancing, isn't it—a part of the love-honor-and-obey stuff? Catch me saying 'I will' to that! Jerry's different. She'd walk over the proverbial plowshares if she thought duty called." She looked across the room to where her sister sat. "I'll say that it's a queer trick of fortune that Bruce Greyson should be your uncle's confidential man and should come to *this* house!"

"Why accent *this*?" demanded Steve Courtlandt bluntly.

Peggy flushed guiltily beneath his stern eyes.

"That's only my exclamatory style. I meant that it was strange that Jerry should

meet him, after—after— I wonder if that was what made her cry last night!"

"Did Jerry cry last night?"

"She cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die swore she didn't, this morning, but her lids were suspiciously pink. Didn't you notice it? Thank you, I should love it," she responded to young Curtis, who had been impatiently hovering in the offing. "There really isn't much fun dancing with old married men," she confided in a tone intended to reach Steve.

She made an impudent little face at her brother-in-law over her partner's shoulder. He smiled and blew her a kiss as she danced away, but her words hurt—hurt because he knew that she was right. He felt years older than he had on that epoch-making October night when his father had revealed to him the state of the family finances, and had presented the means whereby it could be remedied. Had he chosen wisely, he wondered? Wouldn't it have been better to let the property go than to marry a girl who had so quickly acquired an aversion for him?

He looked across at the two engrossed faces in the window. He would break that up. Jerry should remember where she was, and not give occasion for silly gossip. Already Felice Denbigh, who had motored out from town for dinner, had called his attention to Greyson's apparent devotion.

With eyes combative, Steve strolled to where Jerry sat.

"Will you dance with me, Mrs. Courtlandt?" he asked with aggressive formality.

In the midst of a sentence, she looked up in startled surprise. Greyson rose.

"I have committed the unpardonable blunder of monopolizing my hostess, Steve," he apologized; "but the temptation to live over a perfect friendship was too great to be resisted. I will beg a dance from your sister, Mrs. Courtlandt."

Jerry's eyes followed Greyson as he crossed the room. When she looked up at Steve, they made him think of deep, troubled pools. Was it because Peg had put the idea into his head, or did they look as if they had known recent tears? Was poor Jerry already finding her marriage a bar to happiness?

His face was a trifle white, a trifle grim, as he reminded her:

"Do we dance?"

Without answering she rose, and he put his arm about her. Except for taking her

hand, it was the first time he had touched her. How slender she was, how soft, how graceful! He could feel her heart pound heavily against his breast. One might think that she was frightened, but with him—that was absurd.

Her dancing, like her walk, was the perfection of motion. He was very careful of his steps as they danced down the long room. Jerry should have no occasion to echo Peg's reprimand. She stopped.

"Tired?" he asked solicitously, his senses still throbbing from the appeal of music and dance.

She shook her head.

"Tired? I don't know what it is to be tired. Some of our guests are not dancing. Mrs. Denbigh is quite alone and looking horribly bored. Peg seems to have appropriated more than her share of men—she is surrounded. Don't you think that as host you should dance with Felice?"

"Presently. I have something to say to you first." Steve changed his position so that he stood between her and the others in the room. "Why did you cry?"

She crimsoned even under the tiny curls at the nape of her white neck.

"I? Crying? How absurd! You really should go and dance with your guest."

"Not until you tell me why you cried."

"But I haven't been crying."

"Oh, yes, you have! I—"

"Supper is served in the library, Mrs. Courtlandt," interrupted Judson of the velvet tread.

As they left the room in the wake of their guests, the butler detained Stephen Courtlandt and said something in a low tone.

"Has Mr. Greyson gone up?" Steve asked hurriedly. When Judson answered in the affirmative, he turned to Jerry. "I must go to Uncle Nick," he told her. "I may not be down again."

"Is he—"

Steve was mounting the stairs two steps at a time before Jerry had finished the sentence. With a feeling of foreboding she entered the library. The guests were grouped around the fire, with Judson and a maid serving supper.

She stopped in the shadow of the doorway. Up-stairs the spirit of an old, weary man was passing. Here the room and its furnishings made a rich background for the shimmering satin of dainty gowns. The firelight played mad pranks with jewels at

white throats and on pink fingers, with the glittering buckles on silver slippers. Bright eyes were laughing into eyes that pleaded or compelled, and young voices were teasing, challenging.

Jerry's breath came unevenly. She had cried last night. It was a rare indulgence for her, and she could not tell now why she had done so.

How could Steve have known? She hoped that none of these chattering boys and girls suspected it.

She looked about the room. How she loved it! It stood for all the background she had acquired by her marriage. She loved the old seventeenth-century Courtlandt, and held long, one-sided conversations with him when she was sure that she was quite alone. He had given her to understand that a *mariage de covenance* quite met with his approval, that in his day girls married to please their parents.

She wasn't so sure of the judgment of Steve's mother. Her eyes, so like her son's, looked down with a grave question in their depths when Jerry appealed to her.

The group around the fire made room as they welcomed her with gay reproof for tardiness. Felice Denbigh inquired impatiently for Steve. Jerry made his apologies and explained his absence.

The voices of the guests became hushed. One by one they left, almost tiptoeing through the hall. Peggy snuggled up to her sister when the two were quite alone.

"Has—has Uncle N-Nick—gone?" she whispered. Then, as Jerry shook her head: "If—if he does, will you come and sleep with me?"

"I will, dear; but there is nothing to frighten you. Why should there be in the passing of an old man's spirit?"

"But—but he was such a cross old man! What has made you so brave, Jerry? Once you would have dreaded it as much as I—being here at a time like this, I mean."

"Perhaps it is the hours I have spent in the hospital with the sick and wounded soldiers. I have seen so much and felt so much that death has seemed very beautiful, not terrible. Go to bed, child. I'll come in later and stay with you."

She went down the hall.

"But he was such a cross old man!"

Peggy's obituary of Nicholas Fairfax echoed persistently in her mind. What a tragic thing to have said about one! Jerry couldn't blame her sister, for Old Nick had

been consistently disagreeable to her, and Peg was too young to take into consideration his age and illness.

She lingered for a moment before the door of the room in which Fairfax lay. Could she help?

The nurse came out suddenly and almost ran into her.

"Goodness, Mrs. Courtlandt, you gave me a start! I was just coming for you. Mr. Stephen sent me. His uncle wants you."

With her breath coming hurriedly, her heart pounding, Jerry followed the woman. What could Old Nick want? To continue his insults?

She passed into the inner room. The window was open to let in the clear winter air. The old man was raised high on his pillows. Steve held one of the gnarled hands, and Peter Courtlandt was behind him. Greyson, as rigid and immovable as one of the mountains of his own country, stood at the foot of the bed. Dr. Rand, his face grave and deeply lined, motioned the girl to take her place opposite Steve; then he and the nurse and Greyson moved back to the outer room.

As Jerry bent over him, Nicholas Fairfax looked up into her eyes. They met his tenderly. The tenseness of his expression relaxed, and he fumbled for something under his pillow. Jerry reached for him and drew out an open prayer-book. His shaking finger pointed to the page—it was the marriage service.

"Read that—read that aloud!" he commanded in a voice which still held a ring of power.

Slipping to her knees beside the bed, the girl read—haltingly, huskily, at first, but as she lost thought of self in the beauty and meaning of the words her voice cleared.

"'Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony, and forsaking all others keep thee only to him as long as ye both shall live?'"

The gnarled, claw-like hand fell on the book. The old man leaned forward. His voice, weaker now, interrupted:

"'And forsaking all others keep thee only to him as long as ye both—shall live.' Did you mean it, girl, when you made that vow?"

Jerry's face was colorless. There was a broken exclamation from Steve. She laid her hand gently over the icy hand on the

book. Her ardent young eyes met his dim ones steadily.

"I did, Uncle Nick!"

He dropped back with a faint sigh.

"Then it will be all right, Steve. I was afraid—that I might have—but I meant it for the best. It will come right, Doc Rand says. Things will come right—marvelously—unbelievably—right!"

His voice trailed off into silence. The lines of pain and weakness in his face disappeared as if a soothing hand had been laid upon them. The curtains at the open window stirred for a moment and then were still.

VII

CALEB LAWSON paused in the reading of the will of Nicholas Fairfax to peer over his half-moon spectacles. His pursed lips made a red, bulbous blot on his pale face as he regarded the three persons in the library. Outside an ice-tipped vine struck with a ghostly *tap, tap, tap*, against the diamond-paned window.

Geraldine sat beside Peter Courtlandt. Stephen stood with his back to the fireplace. The sunlight which streamed in at the window touched the girl's hair and transformed it into a crown of bronze with curious red and golden lights. The lawyer's gaze lingered on her for a moment before he cleared his throat with a force which sent a premonitory thrill down the spines of his hearers and resumed the reading of the bulky document he held.

"Lastly, all the rest, residue, and remainder of the property, both real and personal, of which I may be possessed or to which I may be entitled at my decease, I give and devise to my nephew, Stephen Courtlandt, to him and his heirs forever, on condition, however, that he take possession and management of my ranch in the State of Wyoming not later than three months after my decease and live there one year with his wife, Geraldine Glamorgan Courtlandt. And on the further condition that his said wife, during said year, shall refuse to receive income from the fund her father has provided for her, and shall dispose of all securities and money she may have. If my nephew, Stephen Courtlandt, or his wife, Geraldine Glamorgan Courtlandt, fail to fulfil any one of these conditions, said property shall be divided as follows:"

The lawyer laid down his papers and looked over the edge of his spectacles at Stephen Courtlandt.

"There is no need of my reading that long list of beneficiaries until I know your decision, Stephen. If your father will take

me to his study, we'll leave you and Mrs. Courtlandt to talk it over."

"You may proceed with the reading. I refuse to accede to the conditions," Steve announced with grim lips.

"Steve!" his father protested. "Think it over before you say that!"

He looked imploringly at the girl beside him, but her eyes were fixed on the interlacing fingers which lay passively on the lap of her black gown.

"Talk with him, Jerry!" Peter Courtlandt pleaded. "Don't let him fling this away recklessly! Come, Lawson, we'll leave the young people to thresh this thing out."

He followed the lawyer from the room and closed the door.

Stephen poked viciously at the coals in the fireplace till a fountain of sparks sputtered up the chimney. Then he backed up against the mantel, and, with a face from which every drop of color had drained, looked down at the bent head of the girl he had married. He laughed shortly.

"Old Nick had a genius for messing things up, hadn't he? When I heard the first clause of that will, which related to me—even when the condition followed that I was to live on the ranch for a year—nothing but a mad sense of freedom thrilled me. I would be my own man once more, rich enough to pay back to your father every cursed cent he had loaned on the Courtlandt property and then have a living income! I could—"

His eyes burned, the veins stood out on his forehead. Jerry realized for the first time the sacrifice of pride and happiness he had made for his family name. She finished the sentence for him.

"You could have your marriage to me annulled."

He looked at her steadily.

"That did not enter into my plan. Why, oh, why, did Uncle Nick have to wreck the whole thing by involving you? I wouldn't take you even if you would go. You married me for what I could give you socially. A precious lot I could give you out there in the wilderness!"

"Nevertheless, I shall go with you."

"What? Why, by your own confession you would starve for people in a wilderness, not for food!"

"Do you want this fortune?"

"More than I ever wanted anything—except one thing—in my life."

Jerry whitened at his amendment.

"I suppose that one thing was Felice. In spite of that I shall go with you. I shall fulfil my part of the conditions, and after you have fulfilled yours, then—then we'll consider."

He strode over to her, seized her hands, and pulled her to her feet beside him. His face was white, his eyes searching.

"Peg said that you would walk over burning plowshares if you thought duty called, and she's right; but—but I sha'n't let you make the sacrifice!"

"You can't help yourself, if I am determined to go. You don't want to start a scandal in society, do you, by refusing to take me? I don't care to go more than you care to have me," she went on bitterly; "but—but I promised. Uncle Nick knew what he was doing when he made me read that marriage service—and forsaking all others—" It was not a fair-weather vow. If your interests take you to the ranch, I shall go with you."

"What will your father say?"

She shrank away from him, but he still had her hands in his and drew her back. Her lips curved in a disdainful smile.

"I think—I think we shall have a fight."

"He will never consent to your going."

"What difference will that make? How can he prevent it? He can't take back what he has given your father. That is all that need concern you."

Steve colored at her tone, dropped her hands, and touched a bell.

"Judson," he ordered curtly, when the butler opened the door, "ask Mr. Lawson and my father to come here."

When the two men appeared in answer to the summons, Glamorgan was with them. His face was deeply flushed, his little green eyes snapped with anger.

"Look here, Jerry! What's this I hear about your going off on a ranch? It can't be done, I tell you! Steve doesn't need that—that old mischief-maker's money." His voice broke queerly, but he steadied it and went on: "Why doesn't he stay here and spend mine?"

"You are quite right, Mr. Glamorgan. I have been trying to impress your daughter with the fact that she need not take her marriage vows literally. I am quite content to eat the crumbs which fall from my rich father-in-law's table."

"Steve!" Peter Courtlandt protested.

(To be continued in the January number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Jerry faced her father. Her black gown brought out the pallor of her face and throat. The only color about her was the vivid curves of her lips; even her usually brown eyes looked black.

"I'm sorry if it hurts you, dad, but I shall go with Steve. He is entitled to his uncle's fortune. What is a year out of our lives? Nothing! I married to please you; now I shall interpret my marriage vows to please myself."

She was very lovely as she defied him.

His green eyes contracted to emerald sparks, and the veins stood out on his forehead like cords. Jerry remembered that it was the first time one of his children had gone contrary to his will.

"What will you do for money? That infernal will strips you of everything. Ask Steve for it? I can see you! Come, Jerry, give this thing up. Settle down here at the manor and be happy!"

For the first time since she had come into the lives of the Courtlandts, Jerry looked like her father. There was the same determination about her eyes, about her lips.

"Be happy! Does smooth going necessarily mean happiness? Does jogging along on the path beaten by our social set mean happiness? Do you know how I feel, dad? It is as if Steve and I had come up against an enormous sign-post bearing the startling information, 'Road Closed—Detour.' The detour may be hard going, for detours usually are; but they offer more thrills and adventures than the broad highway. I'm willing to take a sporting chance if—if Steve wants me!"

With inscrutable eyes young Courtlandt laid his hands lightly on her shoulders and looked down at her.

"I do want you; but remember, if I can win out, half of all that I have will be settled unreservedly on you. You will have earned it!"

She looked up at him for a moment.

"Then, when you have rewarded me for being a good girl, and have paid back father, you will consider yourself in a position to snap your fingers at the Glamorgans?" she said.

He looked down at her with disconcerting steadiness as he answered cryptically:

"I shall consider myself in a position to dictate terms to *one* member of the family. Mr. Lawson, I accept the conditions of my uncle's will!"

Stronger than Death

THE STORY OF GRANDMA PORTER'S LAST CHRISTMAS

By William Merriam Rouse

GRANDMA PORTER had been thinking upon life, but more particularly upon death, for an interrupted hour when she pushed the quilts aside, leaned out of bed, and reached for her hardhack cane. She pounded smartly on the floor.

"All right, ma!" rumbled from the kitchen.

Presently Jim Porter, the youngest of her many sons, bent his head to come through the doorway. He was a tall, strong, bulky man of forty, with a normally good-natured eye.

"Put a stick of wood in the stove and set down," commanded grandma.

Jim picked a big chunk of beech out of the wood-box and let it down easily into the sheet-iron stove. He took grandma's own chair, with the cushion and the head-rest, and drew it up to the bedside.

For a half minute or so she considered him out of her bright, black eyes. They, at least, were thoroughly alive, no matter how her body might have failed her during the winter. They considered his work-caloused hands, the slight droop of his powerful shoulders, and the placidity with which he responded to her demands. She knew, better than anybody else, how much of a nuisance she had become.

"Jim," she said at length, "I ain't going to last much longer."

"Now, ma!" He expressed genuine alarm. "I never heard you talk about dying before. You want to get them ideers out of your head. They ain't good for you!"

"Who said they wa'n't good for me?" she snapped. "I ain't blue about dying, be I?"

Jim opened his mouth, closed it, and remained silent. She sighed. She was really very tired, and it did seem as if she would

never get this favorite son straightened out in his mind; but she must at least try hard to do it before she could depart in peace.

"How's the roads?"

"Well—" Jim considered. "It drifted some last night, but they's been a couple of teams through this morning."

"All right," said grandma. She nodded her head with satisfaction. "If the snow ain't too deep for other folks, it ain't too deep for us. To-night's Christmas eve, ain't it?"

"Yes, ma." He began to look uneasy. "You sure your head's feeling pretty good to-day?"

"Don't argy with me!" She struggled to keep her patience. "My head's a darned sight better 'n yourn, right now! I want you should hitch up and go to the village. Get some hard Christmas candy and some ribbon candy. On your way back stop to the Colbys'. Get a quart of cream. I want some ice-cream to-night, made with real cream."

"But, ma!" protested the now thoroughly uncomfortable Jim. "I thought from the way you talked a minute ago that you was feeling worse."

"The devil!" snorted Grandma Porter. "To hear you talk, anybody 'd think dying was as bad as having a mortgage foreclosed! Take some money out of my pocketbook in the top dresser drawer and go do as I told you. On your way out tell Milly to bake a couple of sponge-cakes. March your boots, or I'll come out there into the kitchen myself!"

Jim went. In the kitchen Milly was putting mince pies into the oven. She was a free-moving, deep-chested woman who carried her chin high; a woman neat and good to look upon—until she turned with a scowl at her husband's step. He regarded her with a complex of feelings which he

could not understand, as he slowly put on his cap and mittens.

"Ma wants me to go to the village for her," he said. "She said for you to bake a couple of sponge-cakes."

"Did she tell you that?" demanded his wife. "Or did you think of them sponge-cakes yourself?"

"Ask her!" He struggled with the anger that rose with such apparent inevitability whenever a conflict threatened. "I wouldn't ask you to make sponge-cake for me, even if I do like it. Go and ask ma if you don't believe me!"

"I will!" Milly closed the oven door and faced him. Little lines etched themselves at the corners of her mouth, and in her eyes he read a deliberate scorn which was hard for him to bear. "I'll bake 'em for her, but I won't do it for a man that ain't got gumption enough to keep the wood-box full when I'm getting ready for Christmas dinner!"

Jim Porter's head went forward, and his hands itched to cuff this woman who prodded him when he was worried and puzzled about grandma.

"I didn't know it was empty," he said. "Nor I didn't know you was too feeble to bring in an armful of wood yourself."

"I ain't; but I won't bring in wood so's a two-hundred-pound man can set in the kitchen and smoke!"

"It's no fun to set in this kitchen and smoke," he retorted. "Not with your tongue going! They ain't any peace in the house!"

"They'd be peace enough if you'd show as much appetite for work as you do for salt pork and potatoes!"

There was a sting of truth in this. Jim was a slow-moving man, though not actually lazy, and during the winter, since the demands of his mother had grown great, he had neglected even his wood-pile. It irked him exceedingly to jump from one thing to another; and he owned a stubborn streak that balked at goading.

"I raised the pork and potatoes, both," he said. "I guess I got a right to eat 'em!"

"You ain't got any right to loaf!"

Now the quarrel came to the conclusion which seemed to be the common end of all their quarrels. Jim was really angry at last, and he growled like a huge dog driven from a warm corner.

"If you don't like it you know what you can do!"

"And that's just what I will do one of these days, Jim Porter!" Her voice shrilled. "I'll get out of here and let you cook your own meals and wash your own dishes! I'd do it right now if it wasn't for grandma!"

"The sooner the better!"

He slammed the door behind him, but not quickly enough to get the last word. She hurled after him her opinion of his quality as a man. He caught most of it, and it made him feel cheap and small. The droop in his shoulders was more pronounced as he harnessed the horse.

It was always like that. They were always threatening to separate, and never did. He sighed, and climbed into the sleigh.

The drive in the still, crisp cold, the mild excitement of trading at the store, and a few minutes' gossip with the Colbys on the way home, cheered him up. So it usually went. He would get his mind calmed down, and then Milly would get after him about something. He would say something mean, and she would call him names that worked in like hedgehog quills.

It hadn't been so before little Jim died, five years ago. It was after the boy had gone that they began to have rows—the boy who was just old enough to talk clearly. For five years the quarreling had been going around and around, around and around, and getting worse. Jim guessed he was as much to blame as Milly was, but he didn't know how to stop it.

II

THE sponge-cakes were set out to cool on the kitchen table when Jim Porter got home. Milly was silent with a speaking silence. He reported to grandma, and then went about the business of making the ice-cream. He did it carefully, for this was Grandma Porter's great delicacy, and the seasons made no difference in her liking. The cumbersome, old-fashioned freezer that she had bought years before was cherished and used only upon occasions of note.

With the chores and all, he was busy until supper-time. The silence between him and Milly continued through the meal. That was usual after a quarrel, and he accepted it as a matter of course. It would probably last until the next day.

He went into the front room, where his mother was, to smoke. She did not talk, but he knew from the look upon her face

and the restlessness of her bright eyes that she was following the sounds in the kitchen and waiting for his wife to get through with the supper dishes.

After a time Milly joined them. She had on a freshly ironed dress, and her hair, as always, was perfect in its smooth neatness.

"Now, Jim," said grandma, in a voice remarkably soft for her, "you set out the candy. Draw the table up where I can reach it without being a bother to nobody. Then you get your fiddle out and play some tunes. Afterwards we'll have the ice-cream and cake."

Jim fiddled for dances whenever he had the opportunity. The fiddle was his dissipation; but this evening he took it out of its case with some misgiving. His mother's talk of her approaching end was still in his mind, and the celebration of Christmas eve had taken on in his mind something of the aspect of a solemn rite. He rosined his bow and drew forth the opening bars of "Rock of Ages."

"For the land's sake!" Grandma Porter was lifted almost to a sitting posture by the force of her indignation. "Can't you put some ginger into your fiddlin'? This ain't a church!"

Jim broke off suddenly and twiddled his bow. He felt himself red from collar to hair. Milly laughed.

"Good for you, grandma!" she exclaimed. "Jim looks as solemn as a frozen owl!"

In desperation he started "The Irish Washerwoman." Grandma Porter's face lighted with enjoyment. She nodded her head in time to the lively tune. He had no sooner finished than she demanded "Money Musk." Jim sighed, and played it. However, he himself could not keep his feet still. Milly grew brighter.

"Play all the dance tunes you know," ordered his mother. "I can't bother to think of the names, but you play 'em all—and then play 'em all over again. Don't stop and ask questions. I want to think about dances I been to years ago."

Faithfully he went through his repertoire, and then through it again. His mother lay with her eyes closed, now and then beating time with one knotted hand. He noticed that the frown disappeared from Milly's forehead long before the music ceased. At length he rested the fiddle on his knee, unable to remember a tune that he had not played twice.

"That enough, ma?" he asked. "Or do you want I should play some more?"

"Enough's enough," she replied, opening her eyes. "Now you get the ice-cream and the sponge-cake, Milly. Afterwards I got something to say to both of you."

Jim and Milly ate with pleasure a little dulled by wonder as to what was coming afterward; but Grandma Porter enjoyed every spoonful of cream and every mouthful of the cake. Her sharp glance noted when the others had finished. She set her empty dish upon the table and with a great effort raised herself a little higher upon the pillows.

"Now, Jim," she began, "if you so much as pull a long face while I'm talking, I'll give you a piece of my mind, and don't you forget it! I ain't got any strength to waste argying with you, or with anybody else. I ain't a going to try to boss you or Milly, and you can both do as you darn please, but I'm going to tell you what I think and what I'm going to do."

She ceased speaking for a moment, as if to collect her thoughts and strength for a task. Her lips moved. Although the others did not know it, Grandma Porter was making one of her rare definite and coherent prayers for guidance.

"This is my last Christmas," she said. "I've knowed it for some time, and I might jest as well look at it as a chance to get a good rest as to groan and holler about it, the way some folks do; but they's one thing that has kind of worried me. You and Milly, Jim, don't get along together worth a tinker's damn. Ain't that so?"

"If she'd let me alone—" began Jim.

His mother cut off his complaint.

"I don't want to hear you grumble and growl about Milly, nor her about you. I want to get things fixed up so's you'll both be happy. I've thought of a way to do it. I want to see it all fixed while I'm alive, and Christmas is a first-class time to make folks happy."

Jim scraped his feet. Milly made little folds in her apron, and smoothed them out again. Grandma drew breath for the biggest part of her effort.

"The other children has all gone away and got themselves provided for. Once I figgered that little Jim"—her voice trembled ever so slightly at the name—"would have what I got. It's right you and Milly should have it. This place is free and clear. I've fixed to give it to you, Jim."

They's eight hundred and sixty-seven dollars and ninety-four cents in the savings-bank. If they ain't eight hundred left after the funeral expenses is paid, then the undertaker 'll be smarter 'n you be. I want Milly should have the money.

"*And I want you two should separate to-morrow.* You've been quarreling with each other for five years, and it's got to stop. Milly can get a divorce with the money and marry some man she can get along with. Jim can get a housekeeper, or get married again, and make himself comfortable. I guess both of ye'll agree it's the best thing to do."

She knew that she had advanced an idea shockingly revolutionary. It was not a matter of ethics, but of custom. People quarreled and still lived together. She had heard threats of separation from Jim and Milly a great many times, but she knew that they would hardly get to that easy and obvious solution of their troubles of their own volition.

Her eyes traveled from the face of her son to that of his wife. At length Milly looked up from her apron folding, her face lighted by sudden determination.

"I'd just as soon, grandma," she said. "If little Jim was alive—but now it's different. I can't seem to get along with Jim. But who's going to look out for you if I go to-morrow?"

"Don't you worry about me," replied grandma. "I got my plans. What do you say, Jim? Be you satisfied?"

"Yes, ma." He heaved a sigh, as if of relief. "I guess both of us 'll be better off."

"Then it's all fixed." The old lady settled down among her pillows. "I don't want to hurry things, but the earlier you do it to-morrow the sooner it 'll be over with."

"That's right!" agreed Milly.

"I'm glad you ain't taking it solemn," said grandma cheerfully. "Might jest as well take some comfort out of separating, and look forward to getting married again, as to act like you was mourners to your own funeral."

"I can drive over to Brother John's place right after breakfast." Milly had begun to manifest a real interest. "I'll leave the dinner so's Jim can get it himself, and John's hired man can bring the horse back. I been wishing I could get a new start for a long time. I'm much obliged to you, grandma!"

"I'm doing it for both of ye." She closed her eyes. "Guess I'll go to sleep now, if somebody 'll put out the lamp."

III

JIM PORTER did not rest well that night, and he knew that his wife fared no better. He was conscious of no inward protest against what was about to happen, but he felt that it would constitute one of the great changes of his life. Moreover, he knew that his mother's prophecies were likely to come true, and if she said she was going to die, then she was going to die. He was divided between depression and excitement when he got up and did the morning chores.

He hitched up immediately after breakfast and left the horse at the door while he brought Milly's trunk down-stairs and roped it to the back of the sleigh. Then he went into the kitchen again.

She was standing by the stove warming her mittens before she put them on. A fine-looking woman, he thought; neat, and a good worker. He remembered the summer he had "kept company" with her, almost eleven years ago. They had got along all right then.

She did not meet his eyes as she drew on her mittens. He noticed how her brown hair curled out from the edge of her knitted cap. Milly's hair had been one of the wonders of the world to him.

Suddenly she threw up her chin and looked him in the face. It seemed that all the old defiance was in her glance. She walked as far as the door.

"Well, good-by, Jim," she said. "I've told grandma good-by. She's been mighty good to me."

"Good-by, Milly." He cleared his throat. "Good-by. I hope you have good luck, and get along all right."

She put her hand to the door-knob. In some way that action made real to Jim Porter the fact of her going. He realized that this was not like a trip to the village. She would never come back.

In that moment he visioned the future, and heard it speaking to him of her every day. He saw a forgotten apron hanging on a nail by the wood-shed door, and knew what its language would be after she had gone. The cushion in his chair behind the stove, the work of her hands, would call for her. Even the brightness of the well-scoured dish-pan would reflect the memory of her labors.

Her form hazed to his eyes; but he threw his shoulders back and stood still. He'd be darned if he'd eat humble pie, he told himself. Let her go!

The door closed. He heard her speak to the horse. Frozen snow squeaked under the runners of the sleigh.

"Jim!"

A rattle of thumps from the hardhack cane brought him to himself.

"Yes, ma!"

From habit, he moved into the bedroom.

"This here's something Milly forgot."

Mechanically he took a soft handful from her. "Get out and give it to her! Don't stand there with your mouth open! March your boots!"

He flung himself out of the house, a quick-moving man when stirred. The horse and sleigh were just turning from the yard into the main road.

"Milly!" he bellowed, running after her. "Here's something ma says you forgot!"

She stopped. Not until her hand reached to meet his did either of them see what he carried. One of those flimsy pink and white coats that women knit for babies shook out with a faint odor of camphor. Both of them knew it as having been worn by little Jim, and as one of the choicest possessions of Grandma Porter.

Milly clutched the coat with a half-suppressed cry. Their eyes met. The stubborn walls which Jim had raised about his own soul fell as the walls of Jericho fell.

"I don't want you should go, Milly!" he choked. "Honest to God, I don't want you should go!"

She threw her arms around his neck, and, still half in the sleigh, hid her face against his own. Her soft hair and the soft little coat pressed against his eyes.

"Jim!" she whispered. "Jim, dear!"

IV

TEN minutes later, as he led the horse back toward the house, Jim remembered Grandma Porter.

"We better go and tell ma right off," he said. "They ain't no telling what she'll say, but we've got to do it."

It was Jim who took the lead as they went reluctantly into the bedroom. Grandma lay with her black eyes fastened upon the doorway.

"Well!" she began, before they could speak. "You needn't turn turkey red, Milly! Out with it!"

"We—" Jim felt it his duty to draw upon himself the brunt of his mother's wrath, but he found it hard work to get the words forth. "We kind of guess—we don't want to separate."

There followed an exceedingly long moment of silence.

Grandma Porter settled further down among the pillows.

"All tommyrot!" she sniffed. "It won't last!"

"It will last, ma!" protested Jim, all his stubbornness aroused again.

"Mebbe!" said grandma sarcastically. "But I s'pose you know I ain't going to leave my property to feeble-minded people like you two?"

"That's all right, grandma!" Milly took a grip upon the coat-sleeve of her husband. "We can get along."

"It's your own business!" Grandma Porter sniffed again. "Anyway, you don't have to do your billin' and cooin' in my bedroom, do you?"

They backed out with evident relief. From the kitchen came certain sounds which indicated to grandma that young folks and love were out there. A wise old smile spread over her face. She whispered softly to herself.

"That's fixed up! I knew if I could get 'em to separate, and then ketch 'em jest at the right minute, they'd find out what darned fools they be!"

She sighed contentedly and turned toward the wall. Peacefully came the fulfillment of her prophecy that this was her last Christmas.

LOVE'S ALCHEMY

My heart shall sing along the years
That have been paved with gold for me,
Their cobble-stones of pain and tears
Transmuted by love's alchemy.

Rosewell G. Lowrey

The Married Man

A MODERN COMEDY OF ENLIGHTENED THOUGHT

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

Author of "Angelica"

SHE had got used to Andrew's forgetting all sorts of important anniversaries.

In fact, she rather liked him to do so. It gave her something to forgive, and fed her measureless indulgence. All his eccentricities, his absurdities, his brilliant and explosive energy, his terrible exactions, constituted "Andy's ways," which she loved with a deep and pitying love.

Even if he was clever and successful and attractive, he couldn't do the things she could do so easily and so well. He couldn't darn his own socks or cook a dinner or make a bed. She insisted that he was helpless—that all men were helpless. She was the sort of woman who would have pitied Julius Cæsar because he couldn't make an omelet.

Something of this kindly indulgence was reflected upon her nice face as she sat in the library sewing and waiting for Andrew. She was a handsome, dignified, good-tempered woman of thirty-five, who was never to be taken by surprise. No matter what might happen, she would raise her eyebrows and smile and say, "Well?"—which was her nice, kind way of saying, "I told you so!"

And generally she had told you so, because, like so many other unimaginative people, she could almost always foresee ordinary consequences. Her prognostications were based, not upon probabilities, but upon experience.

It was the tenth anniversary of their wedding—an important day in a household. And yet, knowing Andrew as she did, Marian had made no preparations for festivity, because he was as likely as not to forget or to neglect even a special dinner. She would remind him when he came in, and smile at him, and he would be startled and contrite. She would not acknowledge

the little wound that was there, even to herself.

Nor would she acknowledge what she really knew quite well—that Andy wasn't happy, as she was. Hadn't she provided him with all the materials for happiness—a lovely, peaceful home, three pretty, healthy children, and just the social background he required?

What is more, she knew that no just man could find a fault in her as a wife. She was thrifty, conscientious, sympathetic, a correct and popular hostess, an excellent mother. She was never irritable, never gloomy, never exacting. She was handsome, and understood how to dress. There was really nothing within the domestic cosmos to which a sane man could object.

That may have been the trouble. Andrew was a man who did not approve of happiness. He wanted and required to be forever struggling and rebelling and resenting. Marian had often, with amusement, noticed him trying to provoke a quarrel with her; but of course he never could, for she never quarreled.

The clock struck eleven. She sighed a little, laid down her sewing, and picked up a book. It had been a very trying day. Andrew had vanished, without the least regard for appointments he himself had made, or office hours, and she had had to placate all sorts of people without knowing at all the cause of his delinquency. It was simply another of "Andy's ways," and a very troublesome one in a doctor.

She recognized it as part of a wife's duties to smooth the path of her husband—above all, of a husband who was the next thing to a genius. She was accustomed to hearing him spoken of as "brilliant." She was proud of it, and secretly a little proud of his eccentricities. He was an extraor-

dinary man, no doubt about it, and he required a wife of extraordinary tact.

He was a physician, but not satisfied with that. He liked to write articles and give lectures, and he had a reputation as a very daring if not very sound investigator along sociological lines. He had proclaimed and printed office hours; but if he were busy writing, he wouldn't see any one who came, and it was Marian, of course, who did have to see these people and get them away not too grossly offended.

At other times there would be some patient who interested him, and he would shut himself up with him or her; and again in this case Marian had to soothe and placate the other patients who had seen the favored one admitted, and who naturally resented being kept waiting so outrageously. There was not a trace of jealousy, or of curiosity, in Marian. She smiled at his interest in a pretty woman.

She wasn't too much interested in anything—certainly not in the book she had taken up, for she put it down again with a yawn within a very few minutes, to look at the clock and to give a small sigh. She couldn't help wishing that Andrew had remembered what day it was, at least to the extent of an extra kiss. Even the most sensible and placid woman might wish that.

Then, at last, he did come in, in a mood she knew well; and her faint hope that perhaps he had remembered, and would bring her flowers, fell stone dead. He flung himself into a chair, hot and tired and rather pale, with his red hair ruffled up, giving him the look of a sulky and earnest child.

"Well!" said Marian, with a nice smile. "Here you are! Such a day as I've had, Andy! People telephoning and insisting that they had appointments and refusing to be put off; and poor me without the least idea where you were or when you'd come back! There was that poor woman with the albino twins—"

He frowned impatiently.

"That doesn't matter. I don't want the case, anyway. No! See here, Marian. I want to talk to you."

She said "Yes?" inquiringly, with her kind and pleasant face turned toward him, but he didn't look at her. He sat staring at the ground, huddled down in his chair, rumpled, disheveled.

"What is there about him so attractive?" Marian reflected, not for the first time.

He was not handsome, he was very untidy, he was casual, rude, distraught; a slender, wiry red-haired fellow of thirty-five, with a sharp-featured, rather pale, freckled face and restless, bright brown eyes.

At last he looked up at his wife, still frowning.

"Don't be hurt!" he said. "And *try* to understand!"

"Of course I will, Andy."

"I've been walking," he went on, "for hours—almost all day—thinking it out. This lecture that I'm to give, you know, to-morrow—"

"Oh, yes—before the Moral Courage Club."

"I'd made fairly comprehensive notes of what I was going to say; but it's been growing on me, every day, how weak and cowardly it is—how evasive. I hadn't *dared* to be frank. I never have dared. I've compromised. I've lied. I've kept it up for ten years—ten years to-day, Marian!"

"Kept up what?" she asked, startled.

"This damnable hypocrisy!" he cried.

"This wretched, revolting pretense! Do you know that it's the anniversary to-night of that horrible ceremony—that perjury—that mockery we called our marriage?"

Marian had grown quite white.

"Why, Andy!" she faltered. "I never thought—I thought—I always hoped you were—happy!"

He sprang up and began to pace the room.

"I can't *stand* it any longer!" he cried. "I'm at the end of my tether. Oh, this *marriage*!"

"Is it—me, Andy?" Marian asked rather pitifully.

"No! No! It's simply marriage—marriage with any one. It's this base, disgusting monotony, this abominable pettiness, this eternal talk about servants and children and coal-bills and neighbors and card-parties. It stifles me. It sickens me. I can't *live* any more unless I'm free!"

"Do you mean that you—want a divorce, Andy?" she asked, with a gallant effort to disguise her terror and distress.

"No," he answered, "not necessarily. I shouldn't like to lose you altogether, Marian—unless, of course, you'd like to form another connection. Would you?"

"No—no, Andy, I wouldn't!"

"I didn't think so. What I want, Marian, is simply to ignore our marriage. I want to be released from its petty restric-

tions and obligations. Will you do that, Marian? Will you absolve me from all these preposterous 'vows,' and so on?"

"Yes," she answered promptly. "I will—if you like."

"And you won't be hurt? You won't be petty? You won't think I'm not fond of you, Marian?"

She shook her head.

"You see, don't you, that we can be just as fond of each other, and yet go our separate ways?"

"Are we—does that mean—that we're to—part?" she asked.

He came over and laid a hand on her shoulder.

"My dear girl," he said, "I can't live with you any longer."

She couldn't restrain a sob.

"Oh, Andy! Oh! Is there—some one else?"

"No! Can't you see? I want to be alone—to live alone—in freedom. I'll take a house for myself somewhere, and you'll go on here, just as usual; except that I'd like to have the children part of the time. I won't be unreasonable, though."

"I don't think I'd—like to—go on here, without you," she said in a trembling voice. "I'd be—lonely."

"Nonsense! Not after a day or so. You'd enjoy the freedom, too. I've got my eye on a little house that will suit me very well. And really, Marian, I'd very much prefer you and the children keeping on here in the same way. Of course, I should make you the same housekeeping allowance, and so on."

"I would like a little freedom, too," she said. "I—can't stop here—without you, Andrew."

"Well, of course," he answered, rather disconcerted, "I've no right to dictate to you."

"You can stay here," she said, "with the children, and I'll go and stop with mother for a few days, where I can think it over quietly. Then I'll send for the babies. I—you see, I want to—get used to this. It's—rather sudden."

It was no longer possible to conceal the fact that she was weeping. Her husband was really distressed. He patted her lovely, shining hair with a careless hand, while he scowled anxiously before him.

"My dear girl! Please! This isn't a tragedy, by any means. Simply let's be two sensible, modern people who refuse to

be bound by certain conventions. Do be your own sensible self, won't you?"

"I—will—try!" she sobbed. "Only—you'll have to give me—a little time."

He looked at the clock; it was a little after midnight.

"Perhaps I'd better leave you alone," he said. "I'll be going now."

"Going? Where? At this hour?"

"Well, you see—that lecture to-morrow. It's to be 'Marriage from the Man's Point of View.' I can't, with any dignity, any decency, say what I wish to say—be really honest—in the character of a domestic man. It would be a farce. I must be able to say that I'm a free man, do you see?"

"Yes," she said, wiping her eyes. "But—does that mean it's got to begin now?"

"What?"

"The—living apart?"

"I'm afraid so. I thought I'd go to a hotel for the night, and send after my things in the morning."

"Oh, no, Andy, please! I couldn't explain—to the servants. No! That's the only thing I ask you. Let me be the one to go. You can say it's a telegram from mother."

"Nonsense, my dear girl! I won't hear of it! Turning you out of the house at this hour of the night! Let me go!"

"No, Andrew, I'd rather; really I would! I'd like to go. I—need a change. If you'll call a taxi while I pack my bag—"

"You're quite sure?" he asked anxiously, and again she assured him that she really wished to go.

She went up to the big, lamp-lit bedroom, so immaculate, so charming, with its two brass beds, the dressing-table and bureau gleaming with silver, the soft gray rug on the floor, her dear little sewing-table, all the photographs—

"Oh, why?" she cried. "Oh, why do I have to leave it?"

She went about in her brisk, sensible way, selecting things out of one drawer and another and packing them neatly into a bag; but long before she had finished a sudden spasm of pain overcame her. She sat down in her own particular wicker chair, and sobbed bitterly.

"I don't understand!" she cried. "I don't! I don't! Not a bit!"

II

SHE was her usual calm self when she came down-stairs again, and was able to

give her husband a great many directions and suggestions as they rode to the station.

"I'll send a night letter to Miss Franklin to come and take care of the children till I send for them," she said. "I happen to know that she's free now. She's such a capable girl! You'll have nothing to worry about with her in the house."

Anxiously, but timidly, afraid that it was a reactionary and contemptible insistence, but resolute to save herself in the eyes of her world, contemptible or not, she added:

"And you'll be sure to say that I got a telegram from mother, won't you, Andrew?"

She kissed him good-by kindly, pleasantly, and succeeded in getting into the train with her nice smile still on her lips. Andrew was reassured, and went home to spend what was left of the night in completing his lecture notes.

He fell asleep toward morning on the sofa in his office. He would no doubt have slept peacefully on till noon, as he had often done before, if it hadn't been for an unusual noise in the dining-room at breakfast-time. He was a little indignant, for he had never been disturbed before, and he was curious, too. His children—even the four-year-old Frank—were singing lustily, in unison, a jubilant sort of chant, led by a very fresh, clear, loud young female voice.

"Hail! Hail!" they shouted.

All ruffled and rumped as he was, he entered the room, to find a strange spectacle. His three children were standing on the window-seat, with arms outspread and face upturned. Behind them stood a young woman in the same yearning attitude, while they all cried their invocation:

"To the glorious sun that gives us life, all hail!"

That must have been the end of it, for the children got down and made a rush at him.

"Oh, daddy! Mother's gone to grand-ma's!" the eldest little girl told him eagerly. "Miss Franklin's going to take care of us. I'm going to write to mother every single day, but not Jean and Frank. They only scribble. She couldn't possibly read it!"

He was not attending. He was looking at the young woman who stood beside him, smiling. She was a short, sturdy blonde with a very pretty and impudent face, a wide, jolly mouth, and queer gray eyes, which were at the same time immensely candid and quite mysterious.

"I'm Christine Franklin," said she. "I'm the originator of the Franklin method of child care. I dare say you've heard of me. Your wife sent me a night letter to come and take charge of your little family for a time. That's what I do, you know—go from house to house, and liberate."

"Liberate?"

"That's how I put it. I always insist that there shall be no interference from parents or relatives or servants. Then I begin to set the children free—to let them express themselves—to be natural."

"I see!" said Andrew. "Is breakfast over?"

It was not, and after a brief toilet he sat down to enjoy it with his family. He felt that he rather liked Miss Franklin.

"Nothing clinging and hyperfeminine about her!" he thought. "A man could make a friend of a girl like that."

He decided to study her. Now that he was free and couldn't be misunderstood, he had decided to make a comprehensive study of woman in general. He knew that there were points about them that he didn't understand. He couldn't really generalize upon the effects of marriage without a better knowledge of females—he admitted that. Why not, he asked himself, begin with this interesting specimen?

"What is the Franklin method?" he asked her.

"It's not really a method at all," she said. "It would be better to call it a theory. It's simply nature and art, hand in hand. I don't believe in directing or controlling a child. I simply help it along the road it indicates itself. My mission is solely to point out beauty to it."

"That's likely to make it very much more difficult for them to become accustomed to discipline and self-restraint when they're old enough to be held responsible."

"But, you see, I don't believe either in discipline or self-restraint, in children or in adults. The natural impulses are sufficient. No, Dr. Nature implants in us only right and beautiful desires. I look upon self-restraint as superfluous, if not absolutely wrong, in a wholesome person."

"Social interdependence requires—" Andrew began.

"We *shouldn't* interdepend. We should each be a law unto himself. Let us be healthy, in mind and in body; then let desire be the sole rule, the sole conscience. Personally, I know that if I want to do a

thing, it is right to do it. If I want to have a thing, it is a right thing for me to have."

Andrew contested that, but she merely smiled at his arguments.

"Well!" she said. "As for *me*, when I want something, I go after it—and I generally get it."

Andrew met her clear, shameless glance, and an unaccountable shudder ran through him. What a girl! What an enemy she would make—or what a pursuer!

She was undoubtedly an interesting and convenient subject for his new study, but he didn't study her. On the contrary, he avoided her. He shut himself up in his study and tried to write, but the new freedom for his children entailed such a distressing amount of noise and quarreling that he accomplished very little.

He wished to write a long and careful letter to Marian. He was afraid that she hadn't fully understood, that she was a little hurt, in spite of what she had said; but he found it a remarkably difficult thing to explain to a woman that you are very fond of her and yet wish to be rid of her. He was not the first man who has essayed such a task.

The noise in the dining-room became intolerable. He tore up his third attempt at a letter and went in there, in a very bad temper.

"Why the devil do you stay in here?" he shouted to his young family. "Why aren't you out in the garden, or at school, or wherever it is your mother sends you? Don't you know that I'm trying to work?"

Miss Franklin had entered from the kitchen, eating a slice of bread and sugar.

"Ask the cook for some!" she suggested, and the children vanished. "What are you writing?" she inquired frankly.

He didn't care to mention the letter, so he said:

"My lecture. I'm giving one this afternoon, you know."

"What on?"

"'Marriage from the Man's Point of View.'"

She pricked up her ears.

"What is a man's point of view?" she asked.

"For a man," he said, "marriage is moral death. It is slavery—bondage of the worst sort. It is a handicap which prevents any effective progress. It is, of course, an invention of woman's, to safeguard herself

and her offspring. She has found it necessary to provide herself with a refuge, and she has ruthlessly taken advantage of her sinister influence over the more sensitive and conscientious man to impress him with a mass of false and pernicious ideas about the 'home.' Man has not one single advantage to gain from marriage, yet he has actually been taught, by mothers, by women teachers, by all the females who surround young children, to think of it as a privilege. He secures a home. What is a home? A nest for the woman, a cage for the man. What is a wife? The most unprincipled, exacting slave-driver ever yet developed. For her and her children he is required to give all the fruit of his labor, and, in addition, a fantastic and debasing reverence and flattery—"

"You poor thing!" said Miss Franklin.

He stopped short, in surprise.

"Why?" he asked. "What do you mean?"

"You must have been so wretched with your wife," said she.

His face turned crimson.

"I wasn't," he said, with an immense effort at self-control. "Quite the contrary. One doesn't apply general remarks to—specific cases."

"Oh, yes, one does indeed!" Miss Franklin insisted.

III

HE went off quite in the wrong frame of mind to deliver his lecture. When he had taken a stealthy peep at his audience, he became actually nervous. The Moral Courage Club seemed to be made up almost entirely of women—rows and rows of earnest faces. It would be very unpleasant to wound and distress them, as his words were sure to do, especially as they had all contributed toward the fee he was to receive. For a minute he was almost tempted to soften some of his remarks, but his reformer's ardor flamed up again, and he went out upon the platform bravely.

The sight of their feathers and furs and earrings helped him. After all, they were nothing but barbarians, who must be enlightened at any cost. He began. He told them, as kindly as possible, how selfish, how greedy, how uncivilized they were, how unpleasant they looked in their skins of dead animals and feathers of dead birds, with all their savage and unesthetic finery; how brutally they preyed upon man.

"Marriage ruins a man," he said. "It stifles his ambitions; it coarsens him, it debases him. It outrages his manly self-respect. He is debarred from wholesome and essential experiences. He is shamefully exploited. He is forced into hypocrisy and deceit. Partly from his native kindness, partly from his woman-directed training, he never dares to tell the truth to the opposite sex."

And so on, directly into those earnest faces, framed by all their barbaric plumes and furs and jewels. To his surprise and dismay, none of them changed, grew abashed or angry or stern. They were only *interested*, all of them.

They came up in a body when he had finished, and congratulated him.

"You are always so stimulating!" said one.

"You brush aside the non-essentials!" said another.

"It gives one a new outlook!"

"I hope to see it in print. It is so suggestive, dear doctor!"

Only one of the earnest horde made any sort of individual impression, and that was a slender, dark, elegant woman who approached him after every one else had gone.

"Doctor!" she said in a low, thrilling voice. "I feel that I *must* speak to you. Let me take you home in my car, won't you?"

She was interesting, distinguished, and, he fancied, intelligent; so he was quite willing to follow her to her waiting motor-car and to seat himself beside her.

"Your lecture," she began. "It's such a startling idea to me—that of man being the victim in marriage."

"Yes," he said. "It's not the conventional, romantic idea, of course."

"Nor the true one," she cried. "Oh, doctor, your brain may be right, but your heart is wrong! There is so much that you don't seem to know—to understand! You don't seem to realize how hideously *we* suffer—what *we* endure. I cannot pretend to be impersonal. I want to tell you the truth—a side of it that you don't know. I want to tell you of one case. Then you must tell me what you think."

She laid her hand on his arm and looked earnestly into his face.

"I want you to hear my story, and then tell me frankly whether or not *my* husband was a victim!"

It was a very long and very harrowing

story. It obliged them to go to the lady's house and to have tea there, and to sit in her charming little sitting-room until dark, in order that it should all be told.

She was Mrs. Hamilton, she said, known to Marian, as to all other women of any social pretensions in that particular suburb, as the martyr wife of a fiendish husband. What she had suffered no one knew—except the twenty or thirty people whom she had told. She ended in tears.

Andrew comforted her with kindly words and complete exonerations. He said that she was blameless. The clock struck six, and he rose to take leave.

"Good-by!" said Mrs. Hamilton, giving him her slender hand. "Doctor, you've *helped* me. You've *understood*. Mayn't I see you again? You don't know what sympathy means to a lonely, heart-broken woman."

He assured her that he would be delighted to come again, as soon as he had a free moment.

IV

He had declined the use of Mrs. Hamilton's motor; he preferred to walk home and to reflect upon this new type. He was not altogether a fool. In spite of the fact that she was a very attractive woman, he had made up his mind that he would never go to her house again—not even to study her.

"No!" he was saying to himself. "She's morbid—irresponsible. They're really dangerous, that reckless sort!"

A hand clutched his sleeve and a breathless voice cried:

"Oh, doctor, I've been rushing after you for miles and miles!"

It was little Mavis Borrowby, daughter of an old patient. Always in the past Andrew had taken Mavis for granted as part of old Borrowby's background. He was quite disconcerted to see her, this spring evening, as a detached individuality, and a very vivid one.

She took his arm and hung on it, looking up into his face with babyish violet eyes.

"Oh, doctor!" she cried. "I went to your lecture. It was simply *wonderful*! But it depressed me awfully. Please let me walk along with you and ask you some questions!"

"Child, you shouldn't go to my lectures," said Andrew indulgently. "You're too young. They're not for you."

"Oh, but they *are*, doctor! Why, I'm

engaged, you know—at least, I *was* engaged, but I sha'n't be any longer. I wouldn't for worlds do all that harm to a helpless man. I'm going to tell Edward so to-night."

Andrew was a little taken aback. He said something about thinking things out for oneself—not accepting another person's ideas.

"Oh, no!" said little Mavis confidently. "I know you can think ever so much better than me. I *like* to get my ideas from *wonderful* men like you!"

The innocent, naive, violet-eyed little thing touched him with pity. What, he thought, was there in life for her except marriage? He couldn't imagine her engaged in any work, any profession, any art. Would it not perhaps be better if some man were enslaved and sacrificed for the sake of this poor little baby-girl?

"Look here, Mavis," he said; "this won't do. You mustn't throw over this fellow, you know, without a great deal of serious reflection. You might ruin your life and his, too."

"But you said I'd ruin him by marrying him—"

"Never mind that. You—you're too young to grasp it. And there are always exceptions. If you care for this chap—"

"I don't really think I do, much," she said thoughtfully. "Anyway, I simply couldn't stand making a martyr of him, and having him be the one to do all the sacrificing. But, doctor, what *are* we to do, if men mustn't get married?"

He couldn't answer. To tell the truth, he had thought of marriage so exclusively from a man's point of view that he had quite overlooked the woman's. Freedom was all very well, but it wasn't for the little Mavis of this world. He began to deliberate whether there weren't certain men who should be set apart for marriage and martyrdom for the sake of the really nice young girls.

He was about to suggest this theory to Mavis, when he found himself before his own door.

"Hurry off home now, won't you?" he said. "It'll be dark soon. And see here, Mavis, don't say anything to your Edward just yet—don't do anything until we've talked it over. Come into the office some afternoon."

She said she would, and hurried off, in the sunset.

As he let himself in, he heard from the dining-room the uproar which seemed an inevitable accompaniment of the Franklin method. Because playing in the dining-room had formerly been an unimaginable thing rather than a forbidden joy, it was now the rule. The doctor didn't like it. He wanted his dinner in peace. It was not the sort of dinner he liked, either, and Miss Franklin distressed him by incessantly crunching lumps of sugar.

He retired to his study, where he swore furiously to himself; but for some reason which he didn't care to analyze, he dared not tell Miss Franklin to take away the children. Nor was he surprised when she knocked at the door, and, being told to enter, did so, and sat down opposite him, prepared to spend the evening.

Crashes, screams, and slaps from the dining-room disturbed her not at all. She said she didn't believe in supervising children; it hampered them.

She talked persistently about free love, which Andrew didn't like. When spoken of as the relation of the sexes, it was quite proper and scientific; but directly one introduced that idea of love, it was entirely changed. It became sensational and distinctly alarming.

He was thankful when an accident occurred in the dining-room which could not be ignored. Little Frank had climbed into a drawer of the sideboard and broken through, and in the course of his struggles he upset everything within reach.

Once he had got Miss Franklin out, Andrew took good care that she should not get in again.

V

He had forgotten all about Mavis, and he was pleasantly surprised when she came into his office the next afternoon.

"I pretended that I had a sore throat," she said, "so I could come and see you. You see, Edward came last night, and oh, doctor, he did seem so awfully *flat*, after you!"

"You mustn't be so extreme," he said. "There are some men who aren't at all unhappy in marriage."

"I know. Ordinary little men aren't. It's only the *wonderful* men like you. But, doctor dear, I couldn't be happy with an ordinary man. I—I want a man like *you*!"

It wouldn't do, of course, to tell her that there were mighty few men of this sort, and

that they wouldn't care for naive little girls, anyway. Andrew wasn't even much flattered by her admiration; it was too indiscriminate.

"Suppose you don't marry," he said. "What will you do?"

"I thought you could tell me. I thought, of course, you had some perfectly wonderful sort of plan for women."

Well, he hadn't, and he saw that he must make one. It seemed that his first step toward the settlement of this specific case would be to make an analysis, and he at once began. Mavis answered all his questions readily and fully, but he had a suspicion that she told him what she thought he would like to hear, instead of keeping to facts. Still, even at that, he learned a great deal, for she was too ignorant and young to deceive a trained observer. Of course it took a very long time; his other office patients had to be sent away.

He went politely to the door with Mavis, and he was surprised to see Miss Franklin standing in the hall—the little private hall which was only for outgoing patients, and in which she had no possible business to be.

"What are you doing out here?" he asked.

"I was just wondering what you were doing," she retorted, "shut up in there with that girl all this long time!"

"I was writing an analysis of her."

"Let's see your analysis!"

"It's not finished. Besides—"

"Do let me see it! Perhaps I can help you."

"You don't know Miss Borrowby—"

"Oh, yes, I do know Miss Borrowby!" said Miss Franklin. "I know her better than you do!"

Andrew didn't like her tone, but he let it pass, with a meekness quite new to him. Miss Franklin smiled and went away.

He intended to spend the evening perfecting his analysis in peace; but scarcely had he got well started when Miss Franklin opened the door.

"A patient!" she said.

It was a lady. She sat down beside Andrew's desk, without raising her veil, and at once began to sob.

"Oh, doctor!" she cried. "I don't know what to do! Oh, my suffering! What shall I do?"

He felt quite sure that this was a drug addict, and his manner, though kind, was one of thorough sophistication.

"Now, now, my dear madam!" he said.

"Don't excite yourself!"

"You don't even *know* me!" she cried, pushing up her veil.

"I do!" he protested guiltily. "It's Mrs. Hamilton. I knew your voice; but it's dark here in the corners of the room when there's only the lamp lighted."

She smiled bitterly.

"Yes," she said. "That's it. I'm lost in the darkness, outside the circle of lamplight!"

"This chair—"

"I'm speaking figuratively, doctor. I'm in such trouble. I wish I were dead!"

Reluctantly, but in duty bound, he said:

"Tell me about it."

She began to weep again.

"You're the only one I can tell. You showed such an interest in me the other day. You cared, didn't you?"

"Yes, certainly I did; but please don't cry."

"Oh, dear doctor, it is your own great trouble that makes you so sympathetic to others, I am sure!"

"My own great trouble?"

"I heard of it indirectly—through Miss Franklin. She mentioned it to some one I know. She said that your wife"—Mrs. Hamilton dropped her voice, and ended with the greatest delicacy: "That your wife has left you. I *am* so sorry!"

"Nothing of the sort!" Andrew began angrily.

Then it occurred to him that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to explain so modern a situation to so romantic a creature; so instead he encouraged her to tell him her own sad story.

He never learned what her trouble was, because she didn't tell him. "My husband" and "a woman's sensitive heart," and "disgusting intoxication," had something to do with it. She cried forlornly, and he tried to stop her. Common sense and all that he had learned from experience of her type warned him not to be too sympathetic, but it was difficult. She was exquisite. She had a sort of morbid charm about her—a sensibility at once dangerous and pitiful.

He rose, went over to her, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"It's hard," he said. "Life is bound to be hard for people like you; but you must try to see it in a more robust way, with more humor, more indifference."

"I do! No one knows how I try!" she said, looking up into his face with her dark eyes, luminous with tears.

Suddenly the door opened, without warning. Miss Franklin looked in, and disappeared again. Mrs. Hamilton rose.

"Who was that?" she asked.

"That's Miss Franklin."

"Oh! I didn't know she was so young. Does she stay here as late as this?"

"She lives here."

"Lives here—with your wife away?"

Mrs. Hamilton was moving toward the door.

"Good night, doctor!" she said, and there was a decided coolness in her voice.

VI

PECULIARLY disturbed, Andrew returned to his office, to find Miss Franklin there, waiting for him. He was about to reprove her sharply for her outrageous intrusion, but she spoke first.

"Who was that?"

"A patient; and you must never, under any circumstances, come into this room when I have a patient here."

"It's long after office hours. I didn't know it was a patient. She was 'a lady to see the doctor,' and I wondered what you were doing shut up here."

"You needn't constitute yourself my mentor!" he cried angrily.

"Why, doctor, I never thought of such a thing!"

"Then please don't do it again."

"But, if she wasn't a patient, what was she here for?"

He stared at her, astounded at her effrontery—and uneasy.

"As I told you once before, I am making a series of analyses. I was making a study of—that lady."

"You only analyze women, don't you?"

"Certainly not!" he answered with a frown. "Only they happen to be about—"

"Yes, they do!" Miss Franklin agreed warmly. "They certainly do happen to be about!" She sat down. "I've been analyzing *you*," she said.

Again instinct warned him, and he would have fled.

"Not worth it!" he said lightly.

"I can analyze you," she went on; "but I can't understand myself. I don't quite see why you should affect me so. I'm not at all inclined to sentimentality. I've never felt like this before."

He sat in frozen silence.

"And as a perfectly free woman," she went on, "I'm not ashamed to tell you that I want you."

"Want me to what?" he asked stupidly.

"I'd be even willing to marry you," she said, "as soon as you get a divorce. I can see that you're timid and conventional, like most men."

"Good God!" cried Andrew. "Please—"

"Why not? If you don't love me now, you will later. I'll make you. I've set my mind on you. I think you're a fascinating creature!"

"You don't know me!" he protested feebly.

"I do. I know that I'm in love with you, anyway, and that you're lonely and need me."

"Lonely!" thought the wretched man. "Not exactly!"

Aloud he said nothing, but sat silent, conscious of the steady gaze of her fierce, candid eyes.

"I hadn't intended to tell you to-night," she went on. "I know you're very shy, and I'd intended to win you over little by little. Not by any feminine trickery or illusion, you understand. I'd just reveal myself. I'm sure that if you knew me, you'd love me. We're so perfectly matched," she ended, a bit impatiently. "I wish there weren't all this fuss and trouble! I wish you'd make up your mind promptly!"

"But—" he began.

"Don't answer me now, when you're in this contrary, obstinate humor. I'll wait till to-morrow evening. Now let's talk about something else."

"No!" said Andrew. "I'm going to bed. Good night!"

He went off with a quick step and a frown; but his going was not effective. It was too much like flight, and it was spoiled by the grin on Miss Franklin's face.

Alone in his room he gave up the effort to hide his alarm.

"That woman's got to go!" he cried. "I'm not going to be hounded and bothered by her like this! How am I to do any work? How can I get rid of her?"

Reflection convinced him that he could not.

"Then I'll get myself called away, and I'll stay away until—"

Until what? What was to save him? Where could he find a refuge from feminine persecution?

He went to bed, but he could not sleep. He was quite worn and haggard in the morning, and Miss Franklin observed it at the breakfast-table.

"You look awfully tired," she said. "Why don't you take a rest to-day?"

"Never was busier!" he answered hastily. "I haven't a free moment all day. Please see that I'm not disturbed."

"How am I to know which women disturb you and which ones you're—studying?" Miss Franklin asked with outrageous impudence. "Better give me a list."

He strode into his office, closed the door, and tried to resume that unfinished letter to Marian. He hadn't got well started when the bell rang and the parlor-maid ushered in little Mavis Borrowby, flushed and out of breath.

"Oh, doctor!" she cried. "Such a row! Imagine! I've had to run away! Papa is in the most awful rage!" She sank into a chair. "You see," she said, "I told Edward last night that I wouldn't marry him—ever. I said I didn't believe in marriage. And he—nasty little sneak!—ran off to papa and told him. You can imagine how papa took it, with his old-fogy ideas. He roared and stamped and swore. He wanted to know where I got such ideas from; and I said, very calmly, from you. Then he said I must never speak to you again, and all sorts of nonsense. Of course I said I *would* speak to you, and I would never, never renounce you for any one—"

"Renounce me! Really, Mavis, isn't that a bit—"

"I told him that you were the most wonderful man I'd ever seen, and that I would not give you up. But, doctor dear, where are you going to hide me? He'll be here after me any minute!"

"I'm not going to hide you at all!" cried Andrew. "It's all nonsense!"

"Oh, but you must!" she cried. "You can't be so horrible, when I've been so loyal to you."

"There's no reason for hiding, you silly child! You've done nothing wrong."

"Oh, but papa thinks so! He told me not to *dare* to see you again. He says it's all your fault that I won't marry Edward. He says you've put all sorts of awful ideas in my head. Oh, doctor! There's the door-bell now! I know it's father! Oh, don't let him get me! He says he'll send me to a convent!"

She had clutched his arm frantically and

was looking into his face with brimming eyes.

"Oh, please, please hide me!" she cried. "Just till I can think of some sort of plan!"

He faltered and weakened. At last he opened the door of a clothes-closet.

"Lock the door and keep quiet," he said. "I'll see if I can get him away."

After an earnest look around to see that she had not left any trace of herself—hat, gloves, or other incriminating articles—the doctor opened his office door, and there stood Mrs. Hamilton. She looked very pale and ill.

"Just an instant!" she said, with an odd smile. "I won't keep you a minute. I only came to say good-by."

"Where are you going?" he asked kindly.

She smiled again.

"It doesn't matter. I thought if I came early, before your office hours, I might catch you alone for a few minutes; but it doesn't matter."

"But you have caught me alone," he answered cheerfully. "Sit down, Mrs. Hamilton. I'm in no hurry."

"Please don't try to deceive me," she said coldly. "I know all about that girl who came in here. That nursery governess—that Franklin person—told me in the hall. I have no claim on you, doctor. There's no reason for deceiving me. You're quite, quite free to do as you please. You won't be troubled with me again. I'm going away."

"Where?" he asked, wretchedly scenting some new and obscure trouble.

"It doesn't matter," she said again. "Nothing matters. My husband insists upon my going out to Wyoming with him at once. Of course I refused; so here I am penniless, alone in the world—"

"Your children?"

"He's going to take them. They're better without me, anyway. I'm a weak and indulgent mother. I love too intensely. That's my nature—to be intense. I give—I ask nothing, I expect nothing, I simply give and give. I'm not complaining. I only wish," she ended, with a pitiful little break in her voice, "that there were some one—just one person in the world—who cared! I'm not strong enough to stand alone. I'm not complaining. I know one can't command the heart; but for a little while I did think—"

He felt like a brute.

"Good-by!" she said, holding out her slender hand and smiling pitifully. "Good-by, my dear!"

He grasped her hand.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

She looked at him steadily.

"Good-by!"

"No—look here! You won't do anything reckless?"

"I shall have to carry out my plans. Good-by!"

"I sha'n't let you go like this!"

"Please let go of my hand! There's some one coming!"

VII

As Mrs. Hamilton went out, there came brushing by her, bursting into the room, a stout, middle-aged man. It was Mr. Borrowby, in a terrible fury. He resembled a heavy, solid little dog. One could imagine the impact of his body against the furniture, how he might hurl himself about and always rebound unhurt. His talk was like barking, growling, and snapping, and his bloodshot eyes were fixed unwaveringly upon his enemy. He was terrific.

"Where's my girl?" he bellowed.

"Don't shout like that!" said Andrew. "I can't stand it. I'm worn out."

"I'll wear you out! Where's my girl?"

"I don't know."

"Don't lie to me, you dirty, low-lived, degenerate hound! You vile, treacherous Bolshevik!"

"You're going too far!" cried Andrew. "You'll behave yourself, or I'll put you out!"

"No, you won't! I'll have my daughter, or I'll call in the police. Don't you dare!" he shouted, shaking his fist in Andrew's face. "Don't you dare deny it! That young woman who opened the door for me told me Mavis was in here."

It occurred to the desperate Andrew that the only possible course was that of complete candor.

"What if she is?" he replied. "I'm not—"

"I know what *you* are! Didn't the girl herself tell me that since she'd known you, she could never marry? Good God! I could kill you, you scoundrel! Where is she?"

"In there," said Andrew. "I sha'n't deny it. There's nothing to be ashamed of—absolutely nothing wrong."

He was really afraid, for an instant, that the angry little dog was about to launch itself upon him. Instead, to his relief, Borrowby began to pound upon the closet door.

"Open the door!" he roared.

"No, I sha'n't!" came Mavis's calm response.

"I'll break in the door!"

"All right! Begin! There's a window in here, and I'll jump out of it and run away; and every one will see me from the street!"

In the midst of this pounding and shouting the telephone rang.

"Keep quiet!" Andrew roared. "Stop your infernal noise! It may be something important!"

Mr. Borrowby desisted for an instant. Andrew took up the receiver, to hear the voice of Mrs. Hamilton.

"I want to say good-by to you," she said in a calm and bitter voice. "It's the last word you will ever hear from me. This is really good-by, to you and to all the world. I have something here that will end it all, all my sufferings—"

"No!" he cried. "No! What are you thinking of?"

"Don't worry!" she said. "It is the best way, my dear!"

The doctor gave vent to such a strange and terrible howl that even Mr. Borrowby was startled.

"What is it?" asked a quiet voice beside him.

He was not surprised to see Marian there. He was past surprise.

"Mrs. Hamilton!" he explained. "Going to take poison!"

"Speak to her," whispered Marian. "Tell her you're coming at once."

He did so, and hung up the receiver.

"Now, go up-stairs and lie down, dear," said Marian. "You're worn out. I'll send your lunch up to you. Don't worry about anything. I'll manage."

"There's Mavis Borrowby shut up in the closet," he told her wearily; "and Mrs. Hamilton—and something worrying about Miss Franklin—I've forgotten just what."

"Poor boy!" she murmured. "I'm so sorry! Go on, dear, and lie down. Try not to worry."

He went up-stairs to his room and lay down on the bed, quite exhausted, trying to think, but unable to do so. A long time passed. He watched the trees moving in

the April wind, and the clouds slipping across the gay blue sky.

VIII

At last Marian came, bringing a lunch-tray well laden with the proper things. She set it down on a table at the bedside, and drew up two chairs.

"Now, Andy dear!" she said in her old pleasant way. "Come on! You need food, you know. It's after three o'clock!"

He was really very hungry. He began to eat without delay, while Marian watched him indulgently.

"I telephoned to Dr. Gryce. He'll take your patients to-day," she said. "You need a rest, don't you? Miss Franklin's gone home. Mr. Borrowby took Mavis home, and left a note, apologizing for his mistake. I explained to him about your theories, you know. I sent for Mr. Hamilton, and I stayed with his wife until he came. They had a perfectly beautiful reconciliation. They're going out to Wyoming with the children, to start a new life; so there's nothing to trouble you, is there?"

"Marian," he said gravely, "I'll tell you all about it later on. Just now I can't think of anything but the relief—"

The parlor-maid knocked at the door.

"There's a young gentleman from the *Daily Review*, sir," she said. "He says the doctor promised him an interview."

"The doctor is resting—" Marian began.

Andrew sat up.

"No!" he said. "I'll see him. Bring him up, Sarah!"

"I'll go," said Marian.

"I'd rather you stayed," said Andrew. "I'd like you to hear what I'm going to say."

He was sitting up in bed, more rumpled and excited than ever, when the young man entered. The interviewer was surprised

and a little embarrassed by the presence of a wife, because the opinions which the doctor was reputed to hold on marriage were not the sort of views that most wives like. However—

"We thought it would be of great interest to our readers if you would give us a few words on 'Marriage from a Man's Point of View,'" he began; "along the lines of the address you gave before the Moral Courage Club one afternoon last week, you know."

"I said that marriage hampered and degraded a man, didn't I? I said that marriage was slavery for my sex—don't take that down, that's only what I said last week. Now, please get this properly. I offer, as my earnest conviction, based upon experiment, that marriage is man's only safeguard. Without its protection man could not survive. This is a woman's world, dominated and developed by women. Every man imperatively requires the protection of a wife. Without it, he—he would be hounded to death."

"Andrew!" murmured Marian, rather shocked.

The young man wrote it all down as faithfully as he could.

"That's all. You can enlarge on that. I suppose you would, anyway. You might head it 'Marriage Man's Only Hope.'"

The young man thanked the doctor, took up his hat, and left.

Andrew looked at Marian, and she smiled affectionately at him.

"I shall never know," said he, "whether you had any hand in all this, or whether it just happened; but I'm beaten, absolutely, and you are supremely vindicated. That's what women always do. They're able to prove a man wrong and make him see it himself, in spite of the fact that he's right!"

AT TIMES A VISION—

At times a vision lifts my soul apart.

Descending on me at my daily task,

It sends a sudden music through my heart

And gives, that moment, all my life can ask.

No vague delusion, no uncertain show,

It is a thing that I can feel and know;

It brings God's sure and vast reality.

Miles inland, plowmen smell the distant sea;

Like glorious wine its taste goes through their lips,

And they stop plowing, thinking of its ships!

Harry Kemp

The Stonehill Mystery*

A THRILLING STORY OF SUBURBAN LIFE

By Lee Thayer

Author of "The Unlatched Door," "The Mystery of the Thirteenth Floor," etc.

MORGAN CARRINGTON leaves his house at Stonehill, a residential suburb of New York, and goes to the city, saying that he has business at his bank. He also has an errand at Tiffany's, to get a watch crystal for his neighbor, Dr. Stuart Ogden Stafford, whose name is abbreviated by his friends to "Dr. S. O. S." Carrington does not return either that evening or the next day, causing great anxiety to the members of his household, which consists of Mrs. Louise Carrington, the widow of his half-brother, her daughter Patricia, and two colored servants, Sam and Lily. Their disquiet is increased by the fact that on the morning when he left home there was found, fastened to the back door of his house, a paper inscribed "Watch out—your time is come!"

Patricia Carrington enlists the aid of Dr. S. O. S., who vainly endeavors to ascertain the missing man's whereabouts by telephoning to his clubs in New York and to hotels and hospitals. All that he can learn is that Carrington called at the Carstairs Trust Company.

Patricia's alarm is further increased when she finds that Dr. Stafford has just hired a stranger—an Italian who gives his name as Marco—to work in his garden; for she suspects a possible connection between Marco and the "Black Hand" warning on her uncle's door.

VIII

"GOODA morn', miss!"

Patricia looked up quickly from the topmost row in the garden, which she was carefully weeding, and beheld the smiling, dark face of the man who called himself Marco, leaning toward her over the top of the hedge. The tall hedge reached above the man's shoulders, so that his head appeared singularly detached, and, as she had heard no step, Patricia had a queer, creepy fancy that it might have come there by itself. This fancy was partially dispelled by a hand which suddenly shot up above the mass of green and lifted the soft brown hat from the smiling head.

"Too mucha da hard work for girl," the man went on. "You give Marco job? Doct' Staff', he give me job. I go dere now. Be t'rough t'ree—four hours." The hand raised swiftly three, four fingers. "I come over here den, yes?" The smile was most ingratiating.

"Why, I'm afraid not," said Patricia, hesitating.

She had been working for more than an hour, and the sun was hot. Marco's ex-

perienced assistance would be very acceptable. She had entirely, or almost entirely, got over her feeling of distrust. It was quite a different reason which caused her to say regretfully:

"No—I can manage alone, thank you."

"See, miss!" The man leaned farther over the hedge and spoke eagerly. "I work cheap, me, yes. I work good, too. You ask Doct' Staff', yes. You pay t'irty centa hour. Dat cheap 'nough, yes?"

Patricia shook her head.

"Not to-day, I'm afraid. I'll speak to Dr. Stafford. Later, perhaps."

The man looked disappointed, but suddenly his face cleared.

"Here come Doct' Staff' now. He tella me good man in garden. You ask!"

With another smile he was gone. Patricia rose to her feet and straightened her cramped shoulders. Dr. Stafford was coming through the trees at the corner of the old garden.

She met him half-way. He was carefully dressed, and carried his hat in his hand. There was a question asked and answered in the first encounter of their eyes. No news! It was as plain as if each had

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spoken. Morgan Carrington had gone away on Monday morning. This was the morning of Wednesday, and still no word.

"I'm going into town on the next train," said Dr. Stafford abruptly. "I've arranged things here so that I can."

"Your patients?"

The doctor started and looked at Patricia keenly.

"How did you know?" he interrupted her.

"Uncle Morgan told me where you went every morning," she answered. "He knew."

"Wonder how he found out!" grumbled the doctor. "I thought I'd kept my double life a secret."

"A light set upon a hill cannot be hid," quoted Patty, smiling at the doctor's annoyance.

"But I thought I had a particularly large and opaque bushel," he said ruefully.

"Fear not," said Patricia, in a thrilling whisper. "Your secret is safe with me!"

The doctor laughed and then sighed. It was the only flicker of the girl's natural gaiety that he had seen in these last days. He had missed that gaiety greatly, and wondered when it would make its permanent return.

"Your mother is still quite satisfied?"

Dr. Stafford was not very much interested in the state of Mrs. Carrington's mind, except as it affected her daughter, but he wanted to make sure that the ruse he had devised on the previous evening had been successful.

"Oh, yes," answered Patricia. "I haven't seen her this morning. She isn't up yet; but she was entirely convinced. She's still annoyed with Uncle Morgan for telephoning you instead of her, that he was called away suddenly on business, but she believes it, all right. You did it very well, Dr. S. O. S.!"

"My dear, a doctor who has had to do with neurasthenics learns to lie quite easily, I'm sorry to say. He learns to be something of an actor, too—all in the interest of science." His smile was half apology, half disgust. "I'm thankful my years of training were of service."

"Oh, dear Dr. S. O. S., I don't know what I could possibly do without you!"

"You'd manage very well, my dear, I have no doubt; but it's a great pleasure to have you feel that I'm useful. Now I must hurry, or I'll miss the train. I'll call you

up as soon as I can, for we may get news at any moment. You keep that in mind, my dear child. We may get a complete explanation at any moment, which will make us laugh at our fears."

But the old physician shook his head despondingly, when he was out of sight. All the way in on the train he was racking his brain, trying to think of some explanation which would explain the unaccountable, and failing—failing miserably.

Upon reaching town, he went immediately to Tiffany's.

"Yes," the polite clerk said, referring to his book. "A gentleman left a watch to be repaired for Dr. Stafford, on Monday morning."

He understood that the watch was to be sent, not called for. He thought that it must have gone, but he would find out, and he reached for the telephone.

The doctor checked him with a gesture. It flashed through his mind that if Morgan had made arrangements to have the watch sent, then he must have known that he wasn't coming back. Could he have known—even then?

The repair clerk was looking at him a trifle curiously.

"It was only a small thing—just a new crystal," the doctor said hesitantly. "I rather thought that my friend would have taken it with him."

"We happened to be out of the right size, and had to send for it," the clerk explained. "The gentleman who left it was rather in a hurry, I remember. Said he couldn't wait—that we'd better send it."

"All right!" The doctor nodded. "Just find out, if you will, please. I'll take it if it hasn't already gone."

He remained lost in thought until a young man appeared with the watch in his hand. The clerk received it and turned to the doctor.

"Here it is, sir," he said. "This is Dr. Stafford, I presume. Would you mind showing me a letter or card which will identify you? We have to be very careful, you understand."

He was courteously apologetic.

"I can do better than that, if Mr. Johnson is in. He knows me," said the doctor.

Mr. Johnson was in, it transpired, and at his usual station at the counter beside the door. The ceremony of identification effected and the watch delivered to its owner, the clerk departed.

Dr. Stafford paused to exchange a few words with his old acquaintance.

"Did you see Mr. Carrington when he brought in my watch on Monday, Johnson?" he asked.

"Yes, I did, doctor. I spoke to him as he went out."

"He's looking well, isn't he?" said Stafford carelessly.

"Why, no, doctor. I didn't think he appeared at all well. He looked pale and sort of odd, somehow. He started when I called his name, and I thought he was very nervous; but it may only have been that he was in a hurry. He was all of that, for he jumped into his cab and slammed the door like—like winking."

Dr. Stafford would have liked to ask in which direction Carrington went, but he knew that Johnson was insatiably curious. Also, he felt pretty confident as to which way the cab had driven.

He hurried along the footway beside which he was sure it had passed. Arrived at the imposing doors of the Carstairs Trust Company, he sent in his card to the president, and, after a maddening delay, was ushered into that gentleman's presence.

The room in which he found himself was as imposing as the entrance, and so dark and lofty as to appear almost threatening. In its midst, at a large table and in lonely splendor, sat a small, fat, bald man with an enormous hooked nose and little, beady eyes which were fixed on Stafford with an unwinking regard.

The doctor advanced to the table.

"Mr. Baumgarten?" he said.

The little man nodded slowly, as an idol nods, and kept his eyes on the doctor's face.

"As I wrote on my card," said Stafford, "I wish to speak to you concerning my old friend, Morgan Carrington."

"Yes."

The thick lips opened just enough to emit the word and closed again like a trap.

"I called up yesterday afternoon, and they said you would be here to-day. I'm somewhat troubled about Carrington, and I think you may possibly be in a position to help me."

"So?"

The banker's monosyllable was distinctly discouraging.

"He had a talk with you when he was in the bank on Monday, they told me. Did he by any chance give you a hint of his

plans? Do you know where he was going when he left you?"

For the first time there was a faint gleam in the opaque eyes of Mr. Baumgarten.

"Why do you ask?" he questioned.

"Because—" said Stafford, and hesitated. "I may as well be frank with you, Mr. Baumgarten. It will go no further, I'm sure."

Again the silent little man nodded.

"Mr. Carrington did not come back to his home on Monday," said the doctor slowly. "He has not been back since, and we have had no word of him."

"So!"

It was an ejaculation this time.

"Now," said the doctor eagerly, "will you tell me where he went?"

"I haven't the least idea, my dear sir—not the least in the world."

Baumgarten lifted his hands, palm upward, with an expressive shrug.

"He was with you for some time," urged Stafford. "Did he tell you nothing?"

"He told me a great deal," said Baumgarten; "but to your purpose, nothing."

"You're quite sure? There was no hint in anything he said—"

But Baumgarten interrupted impatiently.

"What he said was plain enough. He wasn't hinting. He put it in plain English; but it wasn't anything in regard to his plans, except—"

"Except—" prompted the doctor, as the other paused.

"Except in regard to his account," said Baumgarten shortly.

"At least you can tell me, or can find out for me, if he had any large sum of money with him—enough to tempt some one to—to do him an injury."

"I should think he had on him, in cash and negotiable securities," said Baumgarten, "enough to tempt almost any man to murder him."

"What?" ejaculated the doctor faintly.

"Yes. And that's all I can tell you, sir," said Baumgarten harshly. "He severed his connection with the Carstairs Trust on Monday."

"You mean—"

"I mean that he withdrew all his securities from the safe-deposit vault and drew out in cash—in cash, mind you—the entire remainder of his account and that of his nephew, Edward Driscoll, from whom he has a power of attorney."

The doctor started, aghast.

"And he gave you no reason—"

"Oh, he gave reasons enough," answered Baumgarten; "but they were idiotic—raving, if you ask me. However, none of them would explain his disappearance. You can take it from me."

"And you can't make a guess—" hazarded the doctor.

"Oh, I could guess, if I liked," replied Baumgarten, with an ugly smile; "but I'd hate to say what I think. His power of attorney was perfectly regular, and we couldn't prevent his taking out his nephew's money. The boy is on the other side, I understand. It was impossible to appeal to him."

He waited a moment to let the innuendo sink in.

"You ought to be able to size your friend up better than I can," he sneered. "I haven't had the honor of knowing Mr. Morgan Carrington very long. He was a friend of the former president, Mr. Lindsay Forsythe. His account was in the bank when Mr. Forsythe retired, a little more than a year ago. It isn't here now. That's all that I can say, and I must wish you good morning, Dr.—er—Dr. Stafford."

The doctor rose to the surface with a little gasp, but under Baumgarten's cold, hard stare, he forced himself to a semblance of composure.

"You will not object to my questioning the door-man?" asked Stafford coldly. "He might have seen—"

"Ask any questions you like, my dear sir, so long—you'll excuse me, for I'm a very busy man—so long as you ask them elsewhere."

The president of the Carstairs Trust touched a button.

"Show the gentleman out, Fletcher," he said to the young man who instantly appeared, "and let him ask any questions he likes of the door-man. Good morning!"

And Dr. Stuart Ogden Stafford was ushered out of the presence.

The door-man proved to be a large, genial Irishman, clothed in spotless gray cloth. He answered the doctor's questions promptly. Yes, he did know Mr. Carrington well by sight. He'd been coming there a long while, had Mr. Carrington. Yes, he remembered that he was there on Monday morning.

"He didn't spake to me whin he wint out, as he usually does," said the man. "'Most always he says, 'Moike,' he says,

'ain't ye dead yit?' he says, er some such cheerful wurruds ez thim. But this toime he didn't notice me till I closes the dure av his cab fer 'm. Then he jus' says, 'H'are ye, Moike?' an' sets down 'longside the other man, and away they goes down the avenoo."

"Down the avenue, Mike?"

"Yis, sor."

"And there was a man in the cab, Mike? You're sure?"

"Sure I'm sure," answered Mike confidently. "I've seed him toimes enough. He's been wid Mr. Carrington a good few av the toimes he's been here lately."

"Could you describe him?" asked Stafford eagerly. "What did he look like, Mike?"

The Irishman scratched his head, tilting his gray cap over one eye.

"Well," he began, "I was koind o' surprised to see Mr. Carrington wid that guy. He wasn't no gentleman, he wasn't—ye kin be sure av that. He wasn't tall, ner yit short, I should say; but I couldn't be sure, y' understand, 'count av him bein' sittin' down in the cab. He wasn't turrible well dressed—"

"But his face," interrupted the doctor. "Can't you tell me something about what his face looked like?"

"Well, now, sor, about a face, it's some-thin' funny, don't ye know?" said Mike, screwing up his freckled countenance and regarding the doctor as one student of humanity might another. "Ye must have noticed how it is yersilf, sor. Ye sees a face often an' often, an' ye knows it's the same face all roight. I sees me ould woman ivery day av me loife, an', honest to God, if I was to tell ye her oyes was blue it's as much as iver I'd loike to swear to. Her hair was yella once, but if it's gettin' gray be now, sure an' I dunno. But, faith, I knows her whin I sees her, an' I know this man, too. Only—well, I ain't exactly sure whether he was loight er dark. I koind o' think his face was darkish—er it moight 'a' been the shadow av the hat he had pulled down over his oyes. Somehow I think his hair was loight, but I'd hate to have to take me Bible oath on it."

In spite of the doctor's anxiety, there was a twinkle of amusement in his eye. He often thought that if something funny happened at his own funeral, the hardest part of being dead would be that he couldn't laugh.

"Did you notice anything else, Mike—anything at all that would help us to find out who this man was? It may turn out to be pretty important."

"Well, I ain't sure whether he was thick or thin. Somewhere bechune, I sh'd say."

Mike was obviously drawing on the dregs of his small powers of observation.

"All right, Mike," said the doctor, feeling that it was hopeless to pursue the subject of the strange man's appearance. "Now tell me something else. Did Mr. Carrington say anything to the man when he got into the cab? Call him by name, perhaps?"

"I didn't hear him say a wurrud, an' that's the truth, sor."

The doctor frowned.

"But you are certain that it has always been the same man?"

"Yis, sor," confidently.

"And how long has he been coming here with Mr. Carrington?"

"Let me see—a couple av months, sor, I should say."

Dr. Stafford considered the answer. It had only been within the last two months, he remembered, that Morgan, as his check-book showed, had had need of money in large sums.

"Was this same man with Mr. Carrington every time he came to the bank lately, Mike?"

The man shook his head.

"Naw, sor. Sometimes Mr. Carrington come in afut. Then he was alone, I'm sure."

"But the same man was always with him when he came in a cab?"

"Well, I couldn't roightly say always, sor, but mostly, I think. An' it was always the same man—nobody else come wid him."

"Do you think you'd recognize this man if you saw him again, Mike?"

"Sure, sor, I'd know him all roight. Mebbe I couldn't tell ye exactly what he looked loike; but you bring him in here, sor, an' I'll tell ye if it ain't him, as sure as shootin'!"

And with this ambiguous assurance Dr. Stafford was forced to be content.

IX

It was with an uneasy mind and a heavy heart that Dr. Stafford accomplished the return journey to Stonehill. The possibilities presented by the facts which he had learned at the Carstairs Trust were dis-

quieting in the extreme; and yet, try as he would, the quiet old man could not keep out of his mind a thrill of almost pleasurable excitement.

Since he had given up his large, eventful life in town, there had been much to interest, but little to stimulate him. A long course of idle and amusing reading had prepared his active mind to take up the problem of Carrington's mysterious disappearance with avidity. Had it not been that Carrington was his friend, and that his continued absence was a serious matter to Patricia, the doctor would have attacked the solution with a sense of exhilaration. As it was, he was torn with conflicting emotions, the most prominent of which was a desire to be of service to the niece of his old friend.

He had telephoned her as soon as he left the Carstairs Trust. The answer to his question was the one he both feared and expected. There had been no word from Morgan Carrington.

Patricia was waiting for the doctor at the Broad Road gate when he came up from the train, and they had a few moments for conversation as they walked up the drive together. The exchange of confidences ceased, however, as soon as they reached the porch, for Mrs. Carrington was there.

"You'll come in to lunch, Dr. Stafford, won't you?" said the gregarious little lady. "Patricia has told me that you have no maid, and you must consider our house yours until you are able to get one."

The cordial invitation was due partly to Southern hospitality, but was extended also because Louise Carrington was distinctly bored, and even the old physician seemed, to her, better than no one. And there really was no one else, though she had hoped, by coming North, for great social opportunities, both for herself and Patricia.

So far, the venture had proved an overwhelming failure. One or two ladies of her own age, or older, had called; but Louise Carrington's type cares little for the society of other women, and they offered her no amusement. They didn't even have personable sons to present to Patricia. Yes, it had been a great and unlooked for disappointment. They might better have remained in Speedwell, though what they would have subsisted on in that quiet old Southern city, Mrs. Carrington did not trouble herself to inquire.

And now Morgan had seen fit to absent

himself for an unstated period. It was very annoying! Even the luncheon didn't seem to her as good as usual. Patricia must speak to the cook. Cold meat with one vegetable and a salad, and nothing but fruit for dessert, was really not the sort of thing to put before a guest. She really must mention it to Patricia. Keeping house was good practise for the little daughter, and it was sweet of Morgan to wish to relieve her—Mrs. Carrington—of trouble and responsibility, but Patricia must really do better than this.

Dr. Stafford found no fault with the fare which was set before him, and, in spite of his preoccupation, partook of it with relish. Patty ate almost nothing, and as soon as her mother had excused herself to take a much-needed rest in her own room, the girl led the doctor into her uncle's study.

Patricia listened to his story with an anxious frown. The old man told it very carefully, striving to alarm the girl as little as possible. When he stopped, she said appealingly:

"Dr. S. O. S., I want you to be honest with me. I want you to tell me everything you know. I can't help feeling, somehow, that you are holding something back. Please don't do it. I'm young, I know, but I've been through quite a lot. Father always took me into his confidence, and I'm sure I was a help to him. You see, mother—well, we always had to take care of her, and I'm used to responsibility. From what you've told me, I can't help thinking that Uncle Morgan has met with something worse than an accident, and that we ought to put the whole thing into the hands of the police."

"No, no!" The doctor spoke hurriedly. "I don't dare—at least, not yet."

"But, Dr. Stafford, why? There is the strange, rough man who was seen with him. There was that hideous thing we found on the back door—a warning that something dreadful was going to happen—"

"By the way," the doctor interrupted, "I wonder what Morgan did with that paper! You gave it to him, didn't you?"

"Yes, and he crumpled it up and put it in his pocket."

"I'd like to have another look at it," said the doctor musingly. "Do you remember just what it said?"

"Yes. It was printed, and the words were 'Watch out—your time is come!' I can see it now."

"You're sure you're right—about the first words, I mean? It wasn't 'Beware—your time is come'?"

"No, no," answered Patricia with confidence. "It was 'watch out.'"

"Strange!" said the doctor. "I should have thought—but no matter. You were saying—"

"About appealing to the police, Dr. S. O. S. I think Uncle Morgan—"

"It's your Uncle Morgan's possible wishes in the matter that I'm trying to consider, my dear," said the doctor slowly. "I'm going to be frank with you, as you ask. I don't see any way out of it, and perhaps your young brain will find some possibility which I have missed."

He paused for a moment. Patricia waited.

"Did you happen to notice, my dear—" The doctor spoke hesitatingly, and began again. "When we were looking for the name of your uncle's bank, we found two check-books, you remember, one of which we rightly surmised to be that of your cousin, Ned Driscoll. I don't know whether or not you observed the stubs, as I did. Well, Ned Driscoll's stubs were all filled out in the same hand—your uncle's. I guessed at once that Morgan was managing Ned's affairs for him while he was in the army. Ned evidently required a certain amount each month for expenses. This was sent to him direct at first, but later to Brown Brothers, who were, of course, his foreign bankers. That was all plain enough. You follow me?"

"Yes, so far," said Patricia, though the fact that she was puzzled by the trend of the doctor's words was evident in her face.

"Well, during April and May, besides these checks for current expenses, large sums had been withdrawn from both accounts. One would naturally have supposed that the money was used for the purchase of stocks or bonds, since the last few years have offered many opportunities for investments. That's what I hoped. That's what I tried to believe when I went to see the president of the Carstairs Trust. But—"

"But what, Dr. S. O. S.?" questioned Patricia anxiously, as the doctor paused.

"I'm afraid," said the doctor sadly, "they may not have been used for that purpose. When your uncle left the bank in company with the unknown man, he carried with him, so far as I can judge, in

cash and negotiable securities, not only the entire remainder of his own fortune, but that of Ned Driscoll as well."

The girl sat perfectly still, staring at the doctor for a long moment. At last she said:

"Why—why, Dr. Stafford! You don't think—"

"I don't know *what* to think," answered the doctor, frowning heavily. "I've known Morgan Carrington for nearly half a century, and I've never had any reason to think he wasn't perfectly honorable and aboveboard; but for many years I've really known nothing of his private life. I can't guess what his necessities may have been. It's easy for us all to be honest, my dear, when we have no temptation to be otherwise. Necessity is a hard master. Do you—do I know what we might do under sufficient pressure? No, my dear child, I can't be positively certain that your uncle's disappearance was unpremeditated. There were a number of little things. He asked me to advise you, to be your father confessor, if anything unexpected should happen to him. That was on Sunday night, the night before he—he went away. I thought it odd at the time, and since then I've remembered—many things. No! Until we have some stronger evidence of foul play, I think it most inadvisable, for Morgan's sake, to apply to the authorities. He may have some secret. He may be eluding some blackmailing scoundrel. He may—"

The butler's step was heard coming toward them down the long front room, and the doctor paused.

"What is it, Sam?" asked Patricia impatiently.

"De milkman's done brought de bill, lak Mr. Carrin'ton ask him las' week, Miss Patty. He waitin' fer de money. He say Mr. Carrin'ton say he mus' git hit ev'y week er he wouldn't gwan tradin' wid him."

"Yes," said Patricia hurriedly, "I know. I'll—" She took her purse from her pocket. "How much is it, Sam?"

"Fo' dolla's en thirty-six cen', Miss Patty," answered the man, referring to a slip which he held in his hand.

Patricia counted out the money. When Sam's footsteps had died away, she still stood looking absently into her purse, her forehead lined with thought.

The doctor spoke on, following the train of argument which the darky had momen-

tarily interrupted. After a short time he became aware that Patricia was not giving him her full attention.

"What is it, little girl?" he asked, laying his sensitive old hand on hers. "Confidence for confidence! There's something in your mind that you haven't told me. What is it? Perhaps I can help you."

With a sudden despairing movement, the girl pulled out her purse and emptied its contents on the desk—a quarter, two nickels, and a dime.

"That's all the money I have in the world, Dr. S. O. S.," she said.

The doctor stared in his turn.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just that. I haven't any more money," Patricia answered.

"But—but!" cried the doctor. "With this big house—and your uncle gone nobody knows where—"

"I've tried to put it out of my mind," said Patricia, striving for composure. "It seemed dreadful to think of such a thing, with Uncle Morgan perhaps—oh, Dr. S. O. S., what am I to do? We have a roof over our heads, but we haven't any credit in the village. Uncle Morgan was absolutely set against my carrying bills anywhere. He said that I could never tell how I would come out with the housekeeping expenses; that tradesmen were notoriously dishonest; that the only right and economical way was to pay cash for everything. He gave me ten dollars every morning, and we were to keep for ourselves everything I could save out of it. It was to be our allowance. I did save quite a little, but—"

"Yes?" the doctor prompted.

"But mother felt that we needed more clothes, and last week she went into town to shop." Patricia opened her hands and let them fall at her side. "It's all gone," she finished sadly.

"Well, my dear child," said the doctor quietly, "it needn't trouble you for some time to come. I haven't a very large fortune, to be sure, but what I have is yours, and welcome."

At the loving-kindness in the old man's voice the girl's self-control utterly vanished. She bowed her head on the desk and sobbed. Stretching out her little hand, she took his and held it fast. With his free hand he gently patted her shoulder.

"Don't cry! Don't cry, Miss Patty!" he said softly.

"Oh, don't call me 'Miss Patty,' Dr.

S. O. S.," she replied brokenly. "All my friends call me Pat."

"All right, Pat," said the doctor, smiling a little. "We are friends, aren't we? Courage, little comrade! 'The devil is dead,' you know."

The girl wiped her eyes and looked up whimsically into the kind face bending above her.

"Isn't it mean, Dr. S. O. S.? I can't even cry picturesquely. The tears all go through my nose." Patty blew that charming but offending organ vigorously. "I'm ashamed of myself for being such a baby; but you're so kind!"

"Then I won't be kind any more," said the doctor fiercely. "Tell me, if you please, madam, just how you're situated. The servants—how about their wages?"

"Oh," Patricia told him, "they're paid by the month. They came on the 25th, and I paid them last week. They don't get any more until the 25th of June. I don't know whether I ought to keep them, though."

"Of course you ought," Dr. Stafford promptly replied. "You couldn't run this big house alone; and your mother—"

"I think mother would just plain die without them," said Patty soberly. "We had five or six at home, and she thought Uncle Morgan was absurd to imagine that I could run the house with two; but Lily and Sam are very capable, and it's been easy enough."

"Well, now, let's forget about them. You tell me what you need, and I'll make you a regular allowance until we hear from your uncle."

"But, Dr. S. O. S.," said Patricia slowly, "supposing—supposing—that we never hear from him!"

"We won't suppose anything of the kind," declared Stafford stoutly.

"Yes, we will," returned Patricia firmly. "We'll face that possibility, and face it at once: Mother and I can't go on living indefinitely on your hard-earned money. We have no possible claim on you."

"Oh, as to that—" interrupted the doctor, but Patty held up her hand.

"I can't do it, dear Dr. S. O. S. It's out of the question. I might never be able to pay you back. I must think of something else. If I only knew how to do anything useful! But I'm young and strong, and I'm not really an idiot. I ought to be able to do something."

"Of course you can," agreed the doctor heartily. "It only needs a little thinking out."

The good doctor's brain was working overtime. Could he make her feel that she had a right to the rent of the old house which he had leased from Carrington? It was worth trying.

"In the mean time," he went on without perceptible pause, "there's my rent, due on the 1st—that's to-morrow. You'll have that to go on with."

Patricia's face brightened, but in a moment it clouded again.

"Have I any right to that, Dr. S. O. S.?" she asked, after a thoughtful pause. "If Uncle Morgan has—well, has gone away with all Ned Driscoll's money, wouldn't everything there is left rightly belong to him?"

The doctor had been afraid she would see that. It annoyed him that his stratagem had been frustrated, but at the same time her sense of fair dealing pleased him.

"That would be for him to say, of course," he said, with a faint touch of irritation. "Damn it, I wish he was here!"

"What sort of a man is Cousin Ned, Dr. S. O. S.? Do you know?" asked Patty. "It seems queer, though he's only a sort of half-cousin, that I've never seen him."

"I've never seen him, either," answered the old man. "He's been away at school and college most of the time, and I've never happened to run across him in the summer. Perhaps he'll be home soon, now. Lots of the boys are back."

He proceeded to hold out this unknown cousin as a source of hope to Pat, though he couldn't see how the boy could rescue her from her difficult situation. Ned, obviously, was as penniless as she.

The two people, the old man and the young girl, fell silent, each thinking deeply. At last Dr. Stafford said:

"There's one thing I'd almost forgotten, Pat, little girl, and it will tide you over your immediate difficulties. I've owed Morgan a hundred dollars for ever so long. I should have paid it before this. It has nothing to do with the property, and I think you can take it with a clear conscience. We'll tell Driscoll about it when he comes, and see if he doesn't think it was right to hand the money over to you. I'm sure he will, if he's any kind of a man, and there's no reason to think he isn't. Then we'll plan something for you to do. You

ought to keep busy, in any case, or you'll make yourself ill with worry."

The doctor spoke rapidly. He was afraid that Pat would remember his admitted incapacity for swerving from the crystal truth.

"I'll just have time to cash a check for you in the village before the bank closes," he added. "You mustn't be without funds, Pat, my dear."

And, waving aside the girl's grateful expostulations, the doctor departed.

X

"I've thought of something, Dr. S. O. S.! Oh, I have a beautiful plan!"

Patricia, unheralded, burst into the doctor's kitchen, her eyes dancing with excitement. The old man, with a large blue apron tied about his waist, was washing up after his evening meal. He cocked a quizzical eye at her over his glasses, and, smiling, handed her a towel.

"All right, Pat! Let's have the great idea," he said.

The girl picked up a glass mechanically and wiped it round and round.

"I could hardly wait to tell you," she said. "I thought of it at dinner, and I could scarcely eat at all. I've left mother reading to improve her mind. She'll be asleep pretty soon, so I won't have to hurry back. Oh, Dr. S. O. S., I think I know something I could do!"

The doctor, who had finished washing the dishes, picked up another towel and proceeded to dry them.

"I'm listening with absorbing interest and two large ears," he said.

"Well, it's just this. You know I haven't been taught to do anything worth while. I can't even sew for sour apples. Look at these buttonholes!" Her tone was one of utter disgust. "I made 'em. Did you ever see anything like 'em?"

The doctor gravely inspected the buttonholes in the front of her white dress.

"They seem very handsome to me," he said seriously. "I admire long lashes."

Pat laughed.

"Just what they look like—the sort they paint on kewpie dolls. They're dreadful, and the very best I could do!"

"Well, they answer the purpose, I should think."

"I can use them. With these big buttons they're nearly all covered; but you can see that I couldn't earn my living by sewing."

"Um-m-m!" said the doctor. "Possibly not, possibly not."

He was pleased to see his little comrade looking so much more like herself. The very thought of a real occupation had acted like a tonic and dispelled, for a time at least, the anxious depression with which she waited from moment to moment for the news which did not come.

"I believe I thought of everything in the world that any girl has ever done to earn a living," Pat went on. "At last the most obvious thing came knocking at my stupid brain. Oh, dear!" she broke off, as the doctor took from her hand the glass which she had been rubbing all this time and placed it with the other dishes on the dresser shelves. "You see, I've let you do everything! It's disgraceful!"

"Not at all," said the doctor, laughing, as he led her into his big, comfortable living-room. "If I had in my head an idea the size of the one you are so carefully keeping from me, there wouldn't be room for anything else—I can see that. Now sit down, Pat, and tell me what it is."

"Well, Dr. S. O. S., it's just this."

Pat leaned forward, her clasped hands between her knees.

"I believe you said that once before, Pat. Come, out with it! What are you afraid of?"

"Oh, I'm just scared to death, doctor, that you may not approve of my plan. Mother wouldn't, of course, but then I think we can fix it so she'll never know. She hates motors—never went out with us at home, nor since we've been North."

"Now look here, Pat," said the doctor impressively, "if you don't satisfy my burning curiosity in just about a minute, I'm going to have a heart attack. I can feel it coming on. My pulse is away above normal now. What has your mother hating motor-cars got to do with the plan?"

"Why, don't you see? I can pretend I'm going for a drive by myself every afternoon, and she'll never suspect—"

"What? In the name of pity, cut my misery short!" cried the doctor, waving his open hands in the air.

"That I'm running a taxicab!" exclaimed Pat triumphantly.

"A taxicab!" groaned the doctor. "Of all the—"

"Now don't say it's absurd and impossible, dear Dr. S. O. S.," cried Pat. "It's the one thing I really know how to do. I

took a course at Speedwell and got a chauffeur's license, so that I could drive for the camp. Some of the older girls among our best people were doing it, and mother let me, too. Father was all for it, of course."

"But running a taxi is a very different affair," objected the doctor.

The idea appealed to the undying spirit of adventure which still made itself felt in the old man's heart, but he strove to be cautious for the sake of his little friend.

"I know it's different," assented Patricia; "but it isn't any harder work, and I can do it easily—oh, easily! I've thought it all out. There's the car, eating its engine off in the garage. Uncle Morgan said it was mine to do anything I liked with. There's a big tank of gasoline that's just been filled; so I can run the car a long time without any extra expense. You know that the cab service here is simply impossible; and the hills are so steep! Millions of people would ride up if the cabs weren't so hard to get."

"Perhaps not millions," said the doctor; "but many people would, of course."

"I'd wear the khaki suit I used at Speedwell," Pat hurried on, "and a small, plain hat. And I have a pair of big driving-glasses that cover my face up so that no one can tell who I am. I'll just put a 'To hire' sign on the car after I get near the station, and I'll meet all the afternoon trains and just make money, hand over fist. They charge fifty cents for one passenger. I always thought it was too much for the distance, but it seems a heavenly sum now. The car being a sedan body makes it practical for all weathers. Oh, Dr. S. O. S., it is a good idea, isn't it?"

She was so happy and enthusiastic that the doctor could not bring himself to throw cold water on her suggestion. Besides, he was not the sort of man to be deterred from doing anything which seemed to him right and desirable, by the consideration of what Mrs. Grundy—fat and comfortable and conventional—might think. The scheme, as Pat outlined it, seemed feasible, practical, and could hardly fail to be remunerative. Also, the doctor thought, it would be great fun.

"My dear, you'll have to let me think it over," he said slowly; but his tone was so little discouraging that Patty jumped to her feet.

"Oh, you will let me do it, Dr. S. O. S.! You will help me!" she cried.

"You must give me time to think it over," he stipulated. "I promised your uncle to keep an eye on you. And I had sort of thought out a little plan of my own—only it wouldn't be quite as sudden as yours. You see, I can make the most *delumptions* preserves and pickles and things, and I was going to propose that we should go into partnership. We could put up the fruits and vegetables from both gardens—I can sell them all, I know—and we could divide the proceeds. We could begin on the strawberries. They ought to be ripe in a couple of days, and you have any quantity of them."

"Oh, Dr. S. O. S., you are a brick! I never had a better pal—except my father," she added softly. She was silent for a moment. "But why couldn't we do both?" she went on. "I shall have lots of time. I think it's only the late afternoon trains that it would pay to meet. I can stand it all—all this fearful uncertainty—so much better if I have something to do every minute."

"Yes, Pat, that's perfectly true," said Dr. Stafford gravely. "If you're occupied, heart and soul, you won't have time to worry about—about your poor uncle. I've been thinking of him almost every minute, too. I can't be satisfied to do nothing, and yet I don't know what to do. I need advice. We both need the advice of some one who understands about this sort of thing. I think Franklin Thornton is the man who can help us, if any one can. He's an old friend of mine and of Morgan's. He's done some of Morgan's legal work, I know, for he drew up the lease for this house. With your permission, I'm going to see him to-morrow and tell him the whole story. He's to be trusted, in any case, and he'll be able to advise us. What do you think?"

"Oh, by all means, Dr. S. O. S.! The thought that Uncle Morgan may be—oh, I can't bear it! And we doing nothing—nothing!"

"Yes, yes," said the doctor. "That's the way I feel. I'll go in to-morrow. Now"—his tone changed—"now mind, I haven't agreed to this taxicab business, but—how big do you think that 'To hire' sign ought to be? I think I have some cardboard."

"Dr. S. O. S.," said Patricia solemnly, looking at him with shining eyes, "I think you are the very nicest man in the whole wide world!"

"I haven't agreed yet, you know," said the doctor, producing a large square of cardboard. "Remember that! Now, how big? We don't want to be too modest, but it mustn't be large enough to look hysterical. About like that? H-m-m—yes!"

He took a glazed picture from the wall and laid it on the table. Placing the cardboard on it and a brass-edged ruler on that, with a sharp penknife he cut out a neat card of the desired size. Then, with great care, he lettered on it the words, "TO HIRE," and viewed his handiwork with pride.

"It's beautiful, perfectly beautiful!" breathed Patricia. "There never was so wonderful a cab sign before in all the world!"

"Not bad—not bad!" said the doctor modestly. "Now here's a box of wafers to stick it on with. Better take the whole box. You'll have to get it off, every time, before your mother sees it."

"Yes, I'll be careful," said Pat gleefully, taking the box and the small placard. "Oh, I am so grateful to you, Dr. S. O. S.!"

"But I haven't given my consent yet," the old man repeated.

Pat grinned a little mischievous, boyish grin.

"I'm all fixed, though," she said, hugging the card, "and I don't exactly see how you're going to stop me. I'll hide it in the car. I have the key to the garage, so you can't get it back unless you use brute force—and, oh, doctor dear, I know you're too much of a gentleman to do that!" She laughed up into his twinkling eyes. "I must run along now, before mother misses me. Good night, Dr. S. O. S., and thank you and thank you and thank you!"

"I'll go down through the garden with you and see you into the house," said the doctor, smiling at the girl's enthusiasm, but secretly feeling a thrill of sympathetic excitement.

"Come on, then," said Pat.

She linked her arm in his, and together they went out into the starry night.

As they crossed the aqueduct, the doctor stopped suddenly and slapped his forehead.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he cried. "I have an idea! I, even I, Pat, have an idea of my own!"

"Impossible!"

"Seems to be, doesn't it? But here it is—sprung full-grown, like Minerva from the

head of Jupiter. You know of my double life, my child. If I help you with yours, why shouldn't you help me with mine? It's a long walk to Harford—at least it seems long in this hot weather. Why won't you let me hire the car and its chauffeur to make my rounds? I would have done it before, only it's so difficult to get a cab here, and I can't afford a car of my own."

"Oh, doctor dear, if you'll let me take you it will make me so awfully, awfully happy! But—but I can't let you pay, you know."

"What sort of talk is that for a business woman?" said the old man sternly. "You'll never get on if you let people ride free—just you remember that! Seriously, Pat, it would be a great help and service to me if you could arrange to take me over to Harford every morning. I was pretty well done up when I got home on Tuesday. You see, I'm getting old, and those poor people depend on me. I haven't many patients. It wouldn't take more than an hour or so."

Patricia was delighted to take him, and the doctor was adamant about paying. After some discussion they agreed on a price, and the old physician was relieved to know that she would have a little assured income, however small.

This matter being settled, they passed down through the garden, and Pat turned in the direction of the garage.

"Help me hide the placard now," she whispered with the air of a conspirator. "I don't dare to take it into the house."

The doctor grinned and nodded. He was renewing the days of his youth.

They avoided the light shining from the back door, which Patricia had left open, and from two of the kitchen windows, and crept on tiptoe around the corner. As they had to pass very near the kitchen entrance, they moved cautiously, for they inferred, from the light in the windows, that Lily and Sam had not yet retired.

In a few steps they gained the garage. Pat unlocked and pulled open the door, which moved quietly on well-oiled hinges.

A whispered discussion took place when they were inside. Patty wanted to light a match and see how the sign would look on the wind-shield; but the doctor's superior caution prevailed, and she was speedily induced to hide it under the front seat and to come away.

The doctor softly pushed the door to,

and as softly Pat locked it. They had turned in the direction of the house, when she caught the doctor's arm.

"What's that?" she whispered, pointing toward the kitchen window.

Silhouetted against it was a dark head in a soft, round hat.

As they looked, the light in the kitchen was suddenly switched off. Stafford sprang forward. There was a faint crashing sound in the shrubbery, the swish of parting leaves, and, for a second, a dark blot appeared, moving rapidly above the smaller bushes down near the drive. Then, swiftly, it disappeared—and the night was calm and still as before.

Patricia clung to the old man.

"Don't—don't go after him!" she panted. "You could never catch him, and it would do no good. Oh, what is it, Dr. S. O. S.? Why is some one watching the house? What does it all mean?"

"I don't know, Pat. I can't imagine. I wish I could! Morgan gone—and the money—I can't see—but I don't feel right about your being here alone!"

Patty laughed tremulously.

"Mother wouldn't feel complimented, I'm afraid, Dr. S. O. S., to say nothing of Sam and Lily. I wonder if they saw!"

"I don't think so, or there would have been an outcry. Lily would have screamed her head off—been sure to; but I don't think they're much protection."

"You needn't fear for me, doctor," said Patricia quietly. "I'm not easily frightened, and in some ways I can take care of myself. I have a good automatic which belonged to my father, and I know how to use it. He taught me; and, if necessary, I will use it, I promise you!"

XI

"AND that's the whole story as far as I know it, Thornton," said Dr. Stafford, leaning back in a leathern armchair and lighting a fresh cigarette. "The whole preposterous, impossible story—impossible, at least, in connection with Morgan. I can't think, somehow—"

He paused, looking into the plain, thin, inscrutable face of the lawyer who had been his friend and Carrington's for years.

Franklin Thornton shook his head and frowned. He had been leaning forward on his desk, his long, bony hands clasped under his chin. He had not spoken once during Stafford's long revelation—if such it

could be called, when so many of the principal facts were totally inexplicable—but had watched his friend's face with concentrated gaze. His thin, somewhat humorous lips were closed in a straight line.

He opened them now with an almost visible effort, as if his long training in keeping his own counsel had somehow interfered with their mechanism.

"It's an odd thing, a very odd thing indeed, Stuart," he said. "I had no notion—no idea—I can't think, even now, that it's possible—that Morgan could do anything dishonest, I mean; for that's what Baumgarten seems to have hinted at. Morgan had a good-sized fortune of his own, or so I always supposed, and what could he be wanting with the boy's money? They were always great friends. Ned was fond of his uncle, I know from my own observation, and I should have said that Morgan cared for him more than for any one else in the world, though a man of his sort doesn't show his feelings openly. I have reason to know that Morgan meant—well, I can only tell you that I drew up Morgan's will some time ago. He meant well by the boy—I can tell you that much."

"Then what could have induced him—"

The lawyer shook his head again.

"What induces people to do the sort of thing we hear of their doing every day? I don't know. Some crochet of the brain, perhaps; some unexpected combination of circumstances; some impulse. Only it wasn't a sudden impulse with Morgan, nor was it wholly unexpected circumstances, I think we may say, that caused him to disappear."

The doctor looked at Thornton.

"Why do you say that, Frank?" he asked, astonished.

"Because," said the lawyer slowly. "Morgan Carrington was in here on Monday morning."

"You didn't tell me that," said Stafford, somewhat nettled. "Why didn't you tell me so at once?"

"I wanted to hear what you had to say; and I know very little—very little indeed. I don't know any more than you where he went, or what he did after he left me."

"At what time was that?"

"At about half past ten, I should think, or perhaps nearer eleven o'clock."

"Then he must have come here direct from the station."

"Yes."

"And what did he want, Frank? Good Heavens, man, don't you see I'm on pins and needles? Why do you think—"

"That he expected something to happen—something that might keep him out of the way, perhaps for some time? Well," Thornton said reluctantly, "I'll tell you. I think I must tell you, though I'm not sure—"

"Oh, go on, Frank, for God's sake! I'm as much interested in Morgan Carrington as you can possibly be, and I only want to do what will be for the best. I can't act intelligently if—"

"Yes," Thornton interrupted quietly, apparently in nowise affected by the doctor's vehemence. "I think it's only fair to tell you that Morgan came in here on Monday morning to add a note to his will."

"Yes, yes!"

For a moment the doctor almost hated his old friend for his deliberateness of speech.

"It was a proviso," Thornton continued evenly, "that in case of his disappearance—Morgan's, you understand—"

"Oh, Heavens, yes! Of whom else are we speaking?"

"Well, in case of his disappearance, his will is not to be proven, no matter what evidences of death are brought to light, for one year from that date—namely, the 29th of May."

The doctor dropped back in his chair.

"Why, why, then," he gasped, "he intended—or he must have foreseen, or planned to go away!"

Thornton raised his hand and shook his long forefinger at the doctor.

"Now don't go jumping at conclusions, Stuart," he said. "Don't go off half-cocked. There are at least two hypotheses, perhaps more. Probably more. We don't know the circumstances—not all of them; anyway. Let's consider what we do know and what it points to. He may have planned to clear out with his nephew's money and live a gay life somewhere. From what we know of the man, that seems absurd; but how much do we really know? Then, on the other hand, he may have some secret. There may be some enemy who has been—blackmailing him, we'll say, and he may have planned to lie in hiding somewhere. I must confess, in view of Morgan's character, that this seems to me almost equally absurd; but these two are the only alternatives which present themselves

to me as possible. He was always an odd fish, was our friend Morgan—impulsive, self-willed, quixotic, overbearing. Oh, you know him as well as I do! He never took me much into his confidence about his private and intimate affairs. You, perhaps, know more."

"No, I don't believe I do. I can't imagine what kind of a secret—"

The doctor broke off and remained silent for a long time.

"Thornton," he said at last, "did you ever think Morgan had any—did you ever know of any old love-affairs he might have had?"

It was the lawyer's turn to be astonished. He looked at Stafford as if he feared for his sanity.

"Certainly not," he said with conviction. "I should think that Morgan Carrington was the last man in the world to be mixed up in any complication of that kind. Why, in Heaven's name, should you suggest anything so ridiculous?"

"Well, as far as I can see, we have nothing but absurdities to deal with," said Stafford doubtfully. "I can't somehow get it out of my mind that that miserable paper which his niece and I found on the back door was put there by a woman. You know those long, black pins—I told you about them."

Thornton nodded.

"What sort of a man, I ask you, would have that kind of pins? They stick in my mind as only that particular brand of pins could stick." The doctor wriggled in his chair, as if he felt their sharp points. "I thought so much about them that I went into a shop to see how they're put up—how they're sold, you understand. I found them easily enough. It seems they're very common; but this particular kind, graduated in size, comes only, so far as I could ascertain, in a paper cube about two and a half or three inches across. Can you imagine a man having a thing like that?"

"No," said Thornton, interested in spite of his better judgment. "I can't, and that's a fact; but many men have wives, and most of those who haven't wives have mothers or sweethearts. The pins would be easy enough to get."

"Yes, yes, of course! I understand that," said the doctor absently. "Perhaps I wouldn't have thought so much about it if—you know I told you that Patricia and I saw some one watching the house last

night. It was very dark, and I couldn't be at all certain. I didn't say anything to her about it, but somehow I had the feeling—I can't say just why—that the head we saw against the kitchen window wasn't a man's head. If it was, he had very thick hair that stuck out unusually far in the back. And I had the impression that the face was veiled. The light in the house was turned out just as I jumped forward, but the face was turned toward me, I'm sure, for the merest fraction of an instant; and yet I didn't see a face at all. It was all black under the hat."

"A mask, perhaps," hazarded the lawyer.

"Yes, of course, it might have been," returned Stafford doubtfully. "My whole idea seems ridiculous in connection with Morgan's age and character, but—"

The two men lapsed into silence. At long last, the lawyer spoke.

"Well, Stuart, it beats me, I must admit. There are so many things about it which seem impossible; but there's one thing which I think is pretty clear. Until we have better evidence that Morgan didn't go away of his own volition—that he isn't staying away of his own free will—we ought to keep everything we know to ourselves. No good can come to him from our starting an inquiry when we have no idea where it will lead, since there is every probability, according to my experience, that he is alive and well. In cases of disappearance of grown persons, and especially men, ninety per cent of them are discovered to be voluntary. I have told you that I have reason to think that he at least strongly suspected what might happen, and his provision seems to indicate that he hoped, some time within the year, to return. One can't say for certain, but it looks that way, doesn't it?"

"Yes," admitted the doctor. "Yes, it looks like that. Only mightn't it perhaps mean, Frank, that if the will were proven before the year was up, the beneficiaries might be in some sort of danger?"

"Now you're getting into the realm of romance—of mere guesswork, Stuart—and I refuse to follow. The will couldn't be administered, in any case, without sure proof of death; and at present there's nothing of the sort. All we have to do is to sit tight and possess our souls in patience. It's my opinion, and I state it with confidence, in spite of your warnings, your strange men

in cabs, and your masked villains watching the house, that Morgan knew what he was doing when he went away, and that he would thank no one for putting the police on his trail. I believe that for some reason best known to himself he thought it necessary to disappear. Whether his reasons were wholly innocent—well, it's not our province to inquire or to judge any man; but I think you must agree with me that for the present your only course is to let sleeping dogs lie. If there are any further developments, we can reconsider our plan of action—or, rather, of inaction."

"Yes," said Stafford, after another long pause. "Yes, I'm sure you're right—for the present. I'm only thinking of Patricia—Morgan's niece, you know. The suspense is telling on the child. She's a little brick, though, and just as full of pluck and courage! I wish I could take some news to her—some good news. Poor little girl!"

XII

BUT the subject of Dr. Stafford's fears and concerns was less unhappy, just at that moment, than he would have thought possible. She had thoroughly enjoyed making his rounds with him in the morning. It had served to distract her mind. It had awakened new interests and increased, if that were possible, her admiration and affection for the little doctor.

He had taken her into some of the hopeless homes within which he seemed to bring the light of a brighter day. His manner toward the ill and needy was so gentle, yet so firm and purposeful, that Patricia felt that she had never seen anything at once so simple, yet so kind and effective.

The thought of his serene, capable beneficence had been with her all the afternoon as she worked in the garden, enveloping her with a feeling of protection and comfort. It was with her still while she rapidly bathed, dressed, and prepared to enter on her new and exciting career. As she viewed herself in the glass, she was sorry that the doctor had not yet returned. She felt sure that he would approve of her businesslike appearance.

It was indeed a smart, self-reliant little figure which took its place, a few moments later, at the wheel of the plain but very presentable car which Morgan Carrington, some weeks before, had added to his ménage. The vehicle swung out of the garage, slipped silently and swiftly down

the drive, and turned in the direction of the railway-station.

When she had reached a bend in the road Patricia stopped the machine, adjusted her big motor-goggles, affixed the "To hire" sign to the front glass, and, outwardly calm, but with racing pulse, slid into the parking space alongside the station.

It was time for the four-ten up train, but Patricia noticed with satisfaction that there was only one taxicab waiting. The driver eyed her and her car with evident surprise, but there were several private motors between them, and the taxi-driver did nothing more annoying than to stare.

In a moment the train pulled in. Patty's heart had been beating rapidly before, but it seemed now as if it must be an over-worked trip-hammer which had taken shelter in her breast. She was, however, in spite of her youth and inexperience, a girl of great courage and self-command. She also had good powers of observation and an undeveloped histrionic talent, and it was with the apparent ease and nonchalance of an old hand that she stepped from the machine and held open the rear door.

She could not bring herself to make the customary gesture of the waiting cabby—arm thrust out and finger extended. She contented herself by putting on what she hoped was an alert and confident manner, trusting to Dr. Stafford's cleverly lettered sign to do the rest.

Quite a number of people descended from the train. Most of them, at that hour, were women. One and all, they looked at her curiously and passed on, either to private cars or up the steep footway. The men, comparatively few in number, glanced at her sidewise as they passed, and turned and looked again. One man started to speak to her, thought better of it, and, with another backward glance, began to climb the long ascent.

Pat's heart went down, down, down. Wasn't anybody going to accept a perfectly good opportunity to ride in a decent cab up that awful hill? What was the matter? Was it herself or the car? No doubt the comfortable sedan looked too prosperous and undefiled for a taxi, but there was the placard, staring everybody in the face. Couldn't they take a hint? Was it going to be necessary—

"Is this car really for hire, and are you the chauffeur?"

Patricia turned quickly and found her-

self looking into the jovial, red face of a stout, handsomely turned out man, by whose side stood a slender, anemic young girl.

"Yes, sir," answered Pat promptly.

She wanted to touch her hat, but concluded that that would be carrying her imitation too far.

"Well, this is a great piece of luck!" said the jovial gentleman. "A decent cab is a rare thing in this God-forsaken town. Are you sure you can drive?"

Patricia drew herself up a little, but answered as promptly as before:

"Yes, sir."

The man looked her over appraisingly.

"All right!" he said crisply. "Get in, Hilda! No. 14 Rosemary Road." This to Patty. "You know where that is?"

The girl hesitated.

"I'm afraid I don't, sir. I'm rather new, you see."

"Yes! H-m—yes, I should think so," said the man, settling himself comfortably in the rear seat. "Almost perfectly brand-new, I should say—and the car, too. Well, drive on up the hill, and I'll tell you where to turn. Nice little car you've got. What is it?"

"An Orcutt," said Patricia quietly, without taking her eyes from the road ahead.

"Never heard of it—never heard of it," said the man. "To the left here. No, never heard of the Orcutt. American car, I suppose. None of the domestic cars any good. Wouldn't have one myself. Been better if I had, maybe, but I can't bear the darned things!"

"Father!" protested the girl by his side.

She spoke as if from habit, with no apparent idea of effectively curbing the language of her rubicund parent.

"Well, I can't bear the darned things, and you know it, Hilda. If I could, would I be without a car all this while? Stripped the ring-gear of my Fiat," he explained to Patricia, "and I have to wait a month or more to have a new one made. Not a part's come into the country all through this infernal war."

He talked on at a great pace, though Patty hardly listened, except to the directions which he interrupted himself to give, from time to time, as the Orcutt smoothly and steadily climbed the winding road. She was wondering if this, her first customer—if that was the proper term—might not be made a permanent one. In her inexpe-

rience she hesitated about broaching the subject, and was still trying to hit upon a correct form of words when the man suddenly said:

"Here we are! White house on the right."

Patricia brought the car to a standstill in front of a large, would-be Italian villa, with thin-faced arches and a roof so red that it looked as if it must hurt.

"Very good—very good!" said the man, alighting. "How much d' I owe you?"

"One dollar," said Pat confidently.

"Still very good!" returned the man. "Last robber charged one fifty, but we won't quarrel about that." He handed her a crisp one-dollar bill. "Now, let me see!" He stood with one foot on the running-board. "Are you planning to meet trains regularly?"

Pat nodded.

"Well, that sounds good to me," said the jovial gentleman, more jovial than ever. "How'd you like to come for Hilda and me every morning, say at twenty minutes past eight, and meet this train at night? Not Sunday, of course, and only one of us on Saturday. Hilda's going to school in town. Art foolishness, but her mother likes it. What would you charge by the week?"

Patty made a mental computation. She wasn't especially good at what she had called, in her earliest school-days, "standing-up 'rithmetic," but under the present stern necessity she achieved what was, to her, a lightning calculation.

"That would be eleven dollars at my regular price, wouldn't it?" she said, and saw by the man's eyes that her statement was correct. "Well," she added, "since it's a regular job"—she had this from Dr. S. O. S., and felt that it sounded well—"I'll take it for nine. I think that would be fair, don't you?"

"Fair in more ways than one!" The man laughed heartily at his small joke. "My name's Turnbull—William Turnbull. Then you'll call for me—us, I mean—at twenty past eight to-morrow. That's good!"

Patricia met with varying fortune when she returned to the station. On one train no one seemed to want her at all. After the next, a somewhat overdressed young man selected her to drive him up to Elmwood Manor, and Pat was afraid, from his appearance, that he might prove objectionable. His timidity overcame his evident

curiosity, however, and he spoke never a word until she deposited him in front of his house. There a blond wife appeared at the door, and the man pressed a half-dollar upon Pat and hastily withdrew.

Later, a hungry business man jumped into the car with scarcely a glance at the driver. Patty drove him home, received her fee, and turned back once more to the station.

It was growing late. This must be her last trip, Patricia thought, glancing at her watch. When the train pulled in, she noticed that the passengers were no longer attired like the lilies of the field. They were, a harder-working class of men and women, and they had no money to spend on cab-hire. Moreover, Pat realized, most of them lived in the small, closely-set houses at the top of the first hill, and could easily walk.

She was making up her mind that it would not be worth while, in future, to meet this train, when, to her joy, she saw Dr. Stafford coming along the platform.

She hailed him gleefully, and he took his seat beside her. As they rolled swiftly up the hill she recounted the thrilling tale of her afternoon's adventures. He was as pleased as she at her success, and noted, with a warm feeling about his heart, how bright her eyes were and how richly the color had flooded back into her cheeks.

The old question had been asked as soon as they had greeted each other, but the reply was the same as before—"No news!"

It had saddened them both for a moment, but the man who had so inexplicably disappeared had played but a small part in Stuart Stafford's busy life. In that of Patricia, the part had been important, but it had not been of long duration. She liked her uncle very much, was learning to love the queer little man, and she missed him. However, youth is youth, and her spirits would not stay forever in the gloom of anxiety and depression.

"Dr. S. O. S. is right," she said to herself, as she fell asleep that night. "There's nothing like a job—a steady job!"

XIII

PROMPTLY at twenty minutes after eight the next morning Patricia stopped her car in front of Mr. William Turnbull's pretentious mansion, waited a moment, and then, following the precedent of experience, "honked" her horn.

Almost immediately the door flew open, and Mr. Turnbull and his daughter appeared and came quickly down the walk.

"If you're always as prompt as this," he said, grinning good-naturedly, "I won't miss any more trains, thank Heaven! Get in, Hilda. Say, listen!" He turned back to Patricia. "I hate like thunder to ride in a car somebody else is driving. Come on! Be a sport, and let me take the wheel."

I atty hesitated.

"You needn't be afraid I'll do any damage," Turnbull continued. "I can drive anything that's got an engine under its bonnet. Move over, and you can sit alongside and coach all you please, so long as you don't grab the wheel. Come ahead—there's a good girl!"

Pat didn't much like surrendering her post, but the man was evidently bent on having his own way, and she was heartily desirous of retaining this steady customer. She was very much afraid that if she stood out for her right to drive her own car, it would end a profitable connection; so she reluctantly slid over on the broad seat and relinquished her place to him.

Turnbull glanced over the gear-shift, the clutch, the brake, and the accelerator, asked a question or two, and took the wheel in practised hands. He drove well and carefully, and Patricia was satisfied. He expressed himself as being so pleased with the performance of the little car that she had a momentary fear that he might buy one instead of waiting for his own to be repaired; but when he stepped out at the station, he only said: "Four-ten train to-night, remember!" and proceeded on his way.

After that he took the wheel every night and morning as a matter of course. Pat was quite content, for the fact that she would allow him to drive seemed to cement and make permanent a most satisfactory arrangement.

It was with a comparatively light heart that Patricia returned to her uncle's house that Friday morning. In spite of untoward circumstances, everything was working out pretty well.

She and her mother had never spent much time together. The little lady, it must be confessed, was very indolent. Since there were no social duties to be performed, Mrs. Carrington was content to spend a great deal of time in bed, and, for

the rest, she had her work to do. Sewing for her darling daughter, she told Dr. Stafford, was her chief interest in life—though the doctor shrewdly guessed, from the long period of time in which a mysterious garment of filmy texture and strange and unaccountable shape was in evidence, that she was hardly overtaking her strength.

They fell, then, into a regular routine. As far as Mrs. Carrington knew, Patricia and the doctor went for a drive every morning, both worked for part of the day in the gardens, and Patricia went driving in that horrid motor-car every afternoon.

But life was hardly uneventful for Patricia. She had her first really exciting adventure in her new profession on this same Friday afternoon.

With an amateur's enthusiasm, she had decided to try meeting some of the earlier afternoon trains, reasoning that if the social and financial conditions of the commuters waned as the day wore on, the earlier she went the better. She was at her post when the three-o'clock train slid into the station. There was no other cab in waiting, and what harvest there was, she congratulated herself, would be hers to reap.

The passengers descended slowly. There were two or three workmen, who paused to light their pipes and then made off in the other direction; an old woman with a market-basket; a couple of gum-chewing schoolgirls in gay, flimsy garments—and that, apparently, was all.

Pat was beginning to be very much disappointed when, above the noise of the starting train, she heard a quick step on the platform, and a man, who must have been riding in the forward coach, appeared around the corner of the station. She glanced at him swiftly with an eye to business.

What she saw was a young man in a good but somewhat worn uniform, with two silver bars on the shoulders and a ribbon of varicolored stripes upon his breast. He was of medium height and well set up, with bronzed face and quick, rather attractive brown eyes. His nose was short and direct, though of no accepted form of architecture. His jaw and chin were strongly modeled. His mouth, above which perched a small, closely trimmed mustache, was rather large, but clean-cut and somewhat whimsical in expression.

What the young man saw, as he ascended the three steps from the platform,

caused him to open his eyes wide with surprise. He had seen girls in uniform in the camp, before he went to France. He had seen them again at the dock when he returned, but they had been driving ambulances or khaki-colored cars on which some official symbol had been conspicuously displayed. This girl was hardly in uniform. Her khaki skirt and coat, even her tan boots, had a somewhat military cut; but her hat was of soft tan felt, with a plain black band, and the car, by the open door of which she stood, was plainly a gentleman's car. The neat sign which indicated that it was a public conveyance appeared startlingly incongruous.

But what struck him as being most incongruous of all was the girl herself. Her slender young figure was so gracefully poised on her well-shod feet; the cut of her clothes and the way she wore them spoke aloud of refinement and breeding; and her face—he could not see all of it, owing to the large motor-glasses, but what he could see was enough, in the circumstances, to intrigue any man with eyes in his head and a young and adventurous heart in his breast. He saw a firm, well-rounded purposeful chin above the straight military collar; curving lips of a delectable rose; a nice little nose, not exactly turned up, but with a pleasing tendency in a heavenward direction; and, through the disfiguring goggles, straight-looking dark eyes.

Meeting their glance, the young soldier became suddenly aware that he was staring. Somewhat embarrassed, he glanced quickly about, saw that there were no other cabs in the broad parking space, and, after a moment's hesitation, stepped forward.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a quick military salute. "I—it—am I mistaken in taking that sign seriously?"

He pointed to the placard on the glass.

Patricia could not help smiling. It was just the least little hint of a smile, but it showed her dimples most engagingly. The young man's bewilderment was genuinely amusing.

"It's—it's a taxicab," said Patricia gravely, "if that's what you mean. Don't you believe in signs?"

"Well, yes, sometimes, but not always." The young man's laugh was certainly very pleasing. "I'd be very glad to believe in this one, though, if I may."

"Certainly," said Patricia, with a little lift of the chin. "I'll drive you wherever

you wish to go. The price is fifty cents anywhere within the village limits."

She said this with a little air of defiance. She wished the soldier to understand at once that their conversation was, with her, purely a matter of business. He met her look squarely.

"Thank you," he said, removing the smile from his face with an effort. "The price is perfectly satisfactory. Will you take me, please, to No. 893 Broad Road?"

Patricia started and gave him a quick look.

"It's Mr. Morgan Carrington's house," the soldier added. "Do you know where it is?"

"Yes," said Patricia slowly. "Yes, I know where it is, but—"

She hesitated. Her brain was in a whirl. Could this be—

The young man's glance was puzzled and questioning.

"But what?" he asked.

"If—if you were going to see Mr. Carrington," said Pat, "I may be able to save you the trip. I happen to know that Mr. Carrington is not at home."

"Oh, he isn't? Now that's too bad!" the soldier exclaimed feelingly. "I've come a very long way to see Mr. Carrington."

"It's very unfortunate," said Patricia, while her thoughts raced.

So he had come a long way, this attractive young soldier, and to see her uncle! Could it—could it be her cousin, Ned Driscoll? He was still supposed to be on the Rhine—at least, that was what Uncle Morgan had told her. Could there be a mistake? Had he returned so much earlier than was expected? Such things did happen.

If so, what should she tell him? It would be absurd to confide to a perfect stranger just how very, very unfortunate it was that Mr. Carrington was not at home. That was a thing to be kept strictly among his immediate family and friends. It was too important to run any risks. Besides, her presence there, and the fact that she was running a taxi, would require a great deal of explanation.

If he would only tell her who he was! But all he said was:

"It's very disappointing to me, Mr. Carrington's being away. I hardly know what to do."

His eyes were fixed meditatively on her face.

Just at that moment the burly form of a blue-coated policeman hove in sight around the corner of the station. His uniform was new and his metal badge very bright and shining. A short club swung from his great red hand. He made directly for Patricia.

"Look here, miss!" he said in a loud, aggressive voice. "You're running a taxicab, you are, and I got to see yer license. I seen you last night, but I wasn't sure what you was up to. If you do a public hackin' business, you got to have a chauffeur's license, see?"

"I have a chauffeur's license," said Patricia quickly. "Here it is."

Reaching into an inner pocket of her coat, she drew out a somewhat soiled pink card and held it out to him.

"What's this?" asked the policeman sharply. "This ain't no New York license. Them cards are white. What you tryin' to put over on me? This is a North Carolina license. That's no good here, an' you ought to know it. You get in now an' drive over to the police-station with me, an' be quick about it, see?"

Patricia's face went red and then white.

"Look here, officer! Just come over here a minute."

It was the soldier who spoke. Obviously he was in the habit of giving commands and of having those commands obeyed.

The policeman saluted surlily and stepped aside. Pat could not hear what was said by either of the men. After a short colloquy, the soldier touched the blue sleeve, and both men disappeared around the corner of the station. They returned almost immediately, and, to Patty's surprise, the disagreeable policeman was smiling broadly.

"All right, colonel," he said, as the soldier advanced toward the car. "I didn't know she was a friend of yours. Sorry I butted in!"

The young man smiled at Patricia reassuringly.

"It's all right. Now, are you ready?"

The girl looked puzzled.

"Get in," said the soldier in a low voice, "and drive up the hill. I'll explain as we go. So-long, officer!"

The policeman saluted again, this time imitating as nearly as possible the soldier's quick, snappy gesture.

Patricia started her engine, and the young man leaped into the seat beside her.

Leaning forward, he pulled the "To hire" sign from the wind-shield and slipped it into the pocket of the door at his side.

In silence Patricia threw in the clutch, and the car sped up the long hill. When they had topped the first rise, and were out of sight of the station, she slowed down.

"What happened?" she asked excitedly.

"Why, nothing much." The young soldier leaned back and folded his arms. "I just gave him a little song and dance about your—your being a friend of mine, come to meet me, and I just home from France, you know. Shame to break up happy meeting—and all that sort of thing. He took it all right." The young man failed to state that what the policeman took most readily was an oblong piece of paper, tastefully embellished with a portrait of Washington on one side, and, on the other, elaborately engraved and printed in green. "So everything is for the best, you see," he went on, laughing, "in the best of all possible worlds. If I hadn't happened to be there, he might have put you in a somewhat disagreeable position, so I was in luck. Seriously, though, if you really are in this taxi business—"

He looked at her rather incredulously.

"I am," said Pat, and closed her lips firmly.

"Well, in that case, you will be obliged to get a New York chauffeur's license. It's easy enough to get." He outlined the correct mode of procedure. Patricia listened carefully to the details.

"I'll do it to-morrow," she said. "It's really very good of you, and I do appreciate your helping me out. Now, where can I take you?"

"H-m—let me see. It wouldn't do to go directly back to the station, would it? That policeman would be pretty sure to be there still, and I'm afraid I drew the long-lost wanderer stuff rather strong. Suppose you drive me about a bit and then land me at a station farther up the line?"

"I have nearly an hour," said Patricia, somewhat doubtful of the propriety of driving about with this strange young man—for, even though he might turn out to be Ned Driscoll, still he was a strange young man to her. She was concerned, too, with the necessity of meeting Mr. Turnbull and his daughter. "I have to meet some one on the four-ten up train, no matter what happens. It's very important."

"Business?" the young man hazarded.

"Yes," said Patricia.

"Well, I don't think you'll have any more trouble with the policeman—at least not to-day; so don't let that worry you. Only I wouldn't put up that dressy little sign again until I got my license."

"I won't," the girl promised readily. "I'll only meet the four-ten train, and I won't need the sign for that. I really am very grateful to you for helping me out. There's—there's a reason why it would have meant a lot of trouble for me if—but I'll get the license to-morrow, and then I'll be all right. Now I'll take you to Dorrs Ferry—that's the next station up the line. You'll be in time for the three forty-eight, I think it is—the next train into town, I mean. I'm so sorry to have been obliged to take you out of your way. However, you won't really lose any time, and the drive over to Dorrs Ferry is lovely."

"I'm sure it is," said the soldier, glancing sidewise at the delicate curve of her dimpled cheek, and wishing that she would see fit to remove the glasses which hid so much of her face. "Please don't apologize. This is much better than a long wait at the station. The pleasure is really quite all mine!"

The car had been running very slowly. Without replying save by a friendly little smile, Patricia pressed her foot on the accelerator, and the car started forward at a better pace.

They had gone but a little farther when the young man turned to her with an engaging smile and said, somewhat abruptly:

"You know I'm simply burning up with curiosity. It's none of my business, and I haven't the least right in the world to ask, but I do wish you'd tell me why you"—with a little stress on the pronoun—"are running a taxi!"

Pat stiffened a little.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but—but I'm afraid I must point out that the first part of your remark was quite obviously—well, you said it yourself, and it's true, you know."

"That it's none of my business?" He nodded sadly. "Yes, I know it; but it really is true, too, that I'm just back from the other side, and I haven't seen a girl to talk to in a month of Sundays. I'm naturally the most curious man in the world, and I feel as if I would probably die in the night if I couldn't find out why—"

The car stopped dead and began slowly to slide back. Patricia slammed on the brakes.

"Anything wrong?" asked the young man, with a glance at her face.

"Why—why, yes," she said. "It just died—the engine, I mean. I can't imagine—no, thanks, I don't need any help. I think I can find out what the trouble is."

She let the car slide back out of the road, jumped out, and lifted the hood. The soldier followed slowly, watching with amused admiration the girl's consciously expert testing of the spark-plugs. She looked the engine all over, then went back to her seat and tried to start it. Nothing happened.

"I can't see anything wrong," she said, stepping to the road again. "Perhaps you can."

The last words carried a faint tinge of annoyance. It seemed to Pat that he was looking at her with more than a trace of masculine superiority.

"I hate to suggest it," said the soldier diffidently, "but it sometimes happens in the best regulated families. You're quite, quite sure that you have enough gas?"

Then Pat remembered, and blushed up to the roots of her soft, dark hair. She had been driving the car more than usual in the last two days, and in the excitement of her new venture she had quite forgotten to replenish the tank. Of course that was the trouble!

What would he think of her—pretending to the high position of a professional chauffeur, and forgetting something so obvious? If she had not been thinking so hard of something else, she would have known by the sound what the trouble was.

The young man had perhaps known it all along. His irrepressible laughter, quickly restrained, only added to Pat's discomfiture. She could have cried with vexation.

"Well, there's only one thing to do when you run out of gas," he said cheerfully, "and that's to get some more. There must be a house up there behind those trees. Here's the entrance. We could phone the nearest garage, and—"

"It won't be necessary," said Patricia quickly. "I can—I know the people in the next house beyond. I can get gas there. We—they have plenty."

She said this confidently, for they had been on the point of passing her uncle's house when the car stopped, and she knew

that there was an ample supply of gasoline in the tank at the garage.

"I'll come with you, if I may," said the young man, promptly. "It will be heavy, and there might not be any one about to help you carry it."

Patricia accepted his offer gladly. If it were her cousin, she thought quickly, he would not know the house, since her uncle had told her that Ned Driscoll had never happened to see the old place. If it were not, it could hardly matter, one way or the other, and he probably would never know.

Anyway, she must have help, for Sam had gone into town for his day off, and it would be very difficult for her to bring down enough gas to run the car over to Dorrs Ferry and back without stopping for more. Her heart was set on keeping her appointment to meet Mr. Turnbull.

The young soldier shortened his long stride to keep pace with her hurried footsteps, and climbed the driveway at her side in smiling silence. He noticed that the girl seemed very familiar with the appliances of the garage; also that she did not think it necessary to go to the house to prefer a request for the required gasoline.

"She must know these people very well," he thought, glancing aside at the large, comfortable house as he helped her fill a big metal can from the pump in the garage.

They had just lifted the can between them, and started out of the door, when a voice from the house hailed them.

"Aw-w-w, Miss Patty!" A smiling darky face appeared in the window. "Yo maw been askin' atter you. You better run in en see her. She was powerful 'noyed caze you wasn't yere when she done woke up. Come in de house, chile, quick! She say she mighty po'ly."

With a quick word of apology, Patricia dropped the handle of the can and ran. Was her mother really ill? Or was it only— She must find out, she thought, and dashed into the house.

Left alone, the soldier set the heavy can down on the drive and strolled slowly forward. His brow was furrowed with thought. He did not wish to pry, but he was most intensely interested. The girl's name was Patty—so much was plain; and this house—he looked at it intently as he drew nearer.

A good house, a very good house, indeed! It was old, but large and roomy. This

must be the kitchen entrance. He came to an abrupt standstill. Something was staring him in the face, which Pat had quite forgotten.

In white figures against a blue background, tacked firmly to a riser of one of the porch steps, was the house number—893. He had seen, when they had turned into the street below, that it was Broad Road. No. 893 Broad Road! He could not be mistaken. This was the house he had intended to come to—Morgan Carrington's house; and the girl driving a public taxi must be—

He checked a low whistle as the girl herself suddenly appeared.

"It's all right," she said breathlessly, coming swiftly toward him. "Now I'll have to hurry—awfully!"

She caught up the big gasoline can.

"Don't try to lift it alone. It's too heavy," warned the young man, assuming his share of the burden.

He did not question her any more as the car sped northward, and for this he valued himself highly. Only when he stepped off at the Dorrs Ferry station did he hazard one query.

"You don't happen to know when Mr. Carrington will return to Stonehill, do you?"

"I—I really couldn't say," answered Patricia. "I'm sorry, but I don't know his plans. I only happen to be sure that he isn't there to-day."

"And you have no way of knowing when he'll be back, I suppose?"

"No," said Patricia. "I have no means of knowing."

She said this very definitely. The young man regarded her with a grave glance, which she met squarely.

The long shriek of the incoming train sounded from up the river.

"Well—thank you," said the soldier. "I'll have to take my chance of finding him. Thank you for a very interesting drive, and—*au revoir!*"

He lifted his hand to his cap and dropped it smartly. His face was smiling, but behind the smile there was a curiously troubled young brain.

"I thank you, too—oh, so much!" said Patricia. "*Au re—oh, I mean, good-by.*"

"*Au revoir,*" repeated the young man firmly—and had to make a dash for the train.

(To be continued in the January number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

The Prize-Winner

THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF RAYMOND JONES, CHICKEN FANCIER

By Bernard Marshall

I WOKE with a dreadful feeling that danger threatened my cherished white Leghorns. The message of warning may have come to me along those ethereal filaments which so mysteriously convey to us thoughts and visions from afar, or it may have been some half-muffled yip or squawk that penetrated through dim, subconscious avenues to my dreaming mind.

At any rate, I sat broad awake and trembling, listening with all my might for any sounds from the yards. I felt certain that some lawless hand was being extended toward the yellow legs of my six exhibit birds in the ornate little house which I had constructed for them a hundred feet from the back veranda, apart from the other and almost common fowls.

Until midnight I had lain awake, my mind torn with conflicting emotions, and struggling to reach some decision as to my future course. In the event of another defeat at Pomona, should I give up the struggle to establish myself as a chicken-fancier—an authority in the county, and perhaps in the whole State, on the true points of the Leghorn breed—on the color and shape of combs and spurs, tail-feathers, hackles, and eyelids that so beautifully distinguish this queenly bird from all ordinary hens? Should I accept Lindstrom's offer for my miniature ranch, with its trim little bungalow, its vegetable garden, and, above all, its modern and admirable chicken corrals and houses—the equipment upon which all my carpentering skill and my deepest and most anxious thought had been expended—and return to my bookkeeping job in Los Angeles?

I had sworn that I would do just this on that miserable day, five months before, when the judges of the Pomona Chicken Show had announced their decisions, and

for the second time, through wilful blindness, utter stupidity, or worse, had omitted all mention of my exhibits. And many times during the summer, while my new flocks were maturing—all of them descendants of that marvelous trio for which I had paid twenty-five good dollars when my enterprise was launched—I had repeated my vow, not only to myself, but to my young neighbor and adviser, Ellen Gardner.

At one more show I would exhibit—just one more. Chanticleer, out of Biddiecluck and sired by Clarion, should appear at Pomona. Then, if the judges continued to be as blind and stupid as they had been during the past year—if the name of Raymond Jones did not appear among the prize-winners—I would throw up the whole business, sell out for whatever I could get, and climb back on my high stool in the railroad office.

Ellen Gardner had five times as many chickens as I, and in some ways knew a whole lot about the business. She had been in it ever since she was graduated from high school, five years before. She made two trips a week into Los Angeles in her little Ford, with huge baskets of clean, white eggs, each one neatly rubber-stamped with the date of its production. She regularly received five cents a dozen over the market price from the stewards of two or three fashionable hotels; and I had to admit that she was probably making more money than I was from my smaller and far choicer flock.

I felt, nevertheless, that she was lamentably ignorant or careless of the finer points of the art, and I had made many earnest efforts to interest her in the illustrations and diagrams of the "Poultry Fancier's Guide." At the best and most instructive of these, however, she would give but a passing glance. Then she would make

some foolish remark, such as asking me if I had taken Chanticleer's pulse and temperature that morning, or if I was going to wear my blue and red prize ribbons on the front of my coat on state occasions, like a German ambassador.

Ellen Gardner was certainly light-minded. She had no worthy ambitions, and I constantly yearned to awaken her better nature. She kept me puzzled all the time. She seemed to have so many dispositions—grave and gay and light-hearted and fantastic and common-sensible.

For one thing, however, she had the best head for business of any woman I ever knew. Somehow, all through that summer and fall, she had been mixed up in my mind with my business perplexities. Every time I thought of my chicken-ranch, and whether I'd better sell out and go, I would think of Ellen just the other side of the wire fence, watering her flocks of white biddies and maybe whistling a rag-time tune.

This was all foolishness, too. In all probability it would not be long before she would marry and move away; so if there was any advantage in getting her advice as to chick-feed and trap-nests and so on, it couldn't be counted on as anything permanent.

A year or so before, I had read with great care and attention a big volume on eugenics, believing that I could gather some ideas that would be applicable to the improvement of clear-bred fowls. Now, to save my life, all I could remember of what the book contained was the description of the woman who, scientifically speaking, would be the proper mate for such a man as myself.

She ought to be a brunette, it seemed, of rather less than medium height, but with good broad shoulders. She should have sparkling eyes, a well-shaped nose, and a firm, full-lipped mouth. In fact, she ought to be exactly such a person as Ellen Gardner.

Along this line I had been doing a whole lot of perfectly useless thinking. I wasn't getting my proper allowance of sleep. Sometimes, when my roosters began to crow about four o'clock in the morning, just after I had sailed down a slowly flowing stream into dreamland, I would wish that I had all their necks under the big shear at the railroad-shops, and could give one good pull at the lever.

That very night I had been arguing with

myself as to whether Ellen was handsomer than Sadie Middleton, a stenographer I used to know pretty well at the office. Sadie was a blonde with light blue eyes, while Ellen had brown eyes and a pointed chin. Sadie danced beautifully, and always wore those soft, trailly things that make you think of a clinging vine. Ellen wore short khaki skirts and a campaign hat, and she knew more about fixing a car than most men do. She hadn't any complexion except the one she wore every day in the chicken-yard; and that, with its rich, even coat of tan overlying the rose, always set me to thinking of the old song about the "nut-brown maid."

I kept asking myself what was the use in going over all this. Ellen Gardner was just my next-door neighbor and a person who understood incubators and brooders. She was engaged to marry Porter Greenwich, a handsome young fellow who ran a gents' furnishings store in Pomona, and who had been in her class at the high school.

I never liked the look of Porter Greenwich's eyes. They were a greenish-gray, and with something about them that I called shifty. Sometimes, when I saw him sitting on the veranda with Ellen or taking her for a ride in his shiny little car, I felt a most violent and surprising dislike, although the fellow had never harmed me in the least.

As I told myself over and over again, it was Ellen who was marrying him, not I. I had enough to worry about in connection with the things that did concern me. I had to find feed for three hundred lusty chicks. I had to decide which of the young stock should go into the cull-yards, and whether it would be best to use rat-traps or poison, or buy a terrier. Keeping track of more than four hundred freight accounts was nothing to it.

II

I LEAPED from my bed and huddled on my clothes. Without, the sky was starlit, but the moon was covered with clouds; and as I peered from the window, all my domain beyond the first lemon-trees was a gray and formless blur. I hurried through the kitchen, avoiding with marvelous good fortune the table and chairs, and softly unlocked the door leading into the shed.

There I easily found, in the darkness, the shotgun which for several days I had had charged and ready for the next visit of

a certain marauding cat. With this at the position of "port arms," I carefully stole across the yard and through the gate into the chicken-corral.

I had approached within twenty feet of the little building which, like the poet's ship of state, bore all my hopes and fears, before I saw by the deep blackness of the oblong space in the middle of its front that the door stood wide open. Instantly I crouched down in the path, as still as a cat in front of a mouse-hole.

I knew that one of two things must be true—either a thief had come and gone, or he was at that moment hiding in the shadows within. I would no more have forgotten to close that door when going my nightly rounds than I would have gone to bed with my boots on.

For thirty seconds I knelt with my gun leveled at the door opening. My breathing I had managed to still; but it seemed that any one within a hundred feet must hear the beating of my heart. Then there was a slight rustle from within the chicken-house, followed by a loud and terrifying squawk. Something had certainly disturbed the birds on the roost.

I hesitated no longer, but called out in a loud and martial tone:

"Come out of that and hold your hands up. I've got you covered!"

An unmistakable gasp was heard from the darkness, but there was no reply and no further movement. I advanced half the distance to the door.

"Come out of that!" I yelled. "If you don't, I'll shoot!"

"Oh, no, no!" came a frightened treble. "Don't shoot—I'll come out!"

When the thief emerged into the starlight, I nearly dropped my gun on the ground.

"Ellen Gardner!" I gasped. "Stealing chickens! I never heard of such a thing! I can't believe it!"

"Well, don't try, then," replied Ellen sharply. "Why should you, if you find it so painful?"

"You of all persons in the world!" I groaned. "And after my prize chickens! Why, I can't believe my eyes!"

Ellen made no reply, but stood before me with sullen, downcast look, grinding her heel into the dirt of the pathway. I was trembling like a leaf, and there were tears in my eyes.

"Ellen, tell me about it," I begged.

"You know I won't be hard on you. Why, I'll give you any chicken I've got—almost. What in the world made you do it?"

Ellen opened her mouth to speak, then suddenly held up her forefinger.

"Listen!" she whispered, pointing the while with her other hand down through the yards and toward El Cano road beyond.

I listened for five seconds. Then I replied, also in a whisper:

"I don't hear anything."

"Sh-h-h!" she cautioned. "Course you don't. There was a machine coming down the hill over there a minute ago; and now it's stopped down there by the bridge. That's the place where somebody stopped an auto one night last week, and when they went on they had about twenty of my best pullets. Let's sneak down that way!"

Silently as ghosts, and keeping under the shadow of the apricot-trees, we crept through the yards, half the distance to my rear fence, beyond which lay the road. Now we could make out the outlines of a small car standing in the grass near the bridge.

Suddenly my companion gripped my arm with sinewy fingers, and I came to a halt. I was on one knee, with the gun at "ready." Ellen put her lips within an inch of my ear, and whispered:

"There they are by the fence—probably cutting a hole through it!"

Then indeed I discerned a dark form just outside the fence that divided my yards from the highway. Seized with a sudden resolution, I advanced on hands and knees to a little gate which opened on the road fifty yards to the left.

Softly raising the hook, I opened the panel and crawled through. Then I stealthily advanced along the gutter to within thirty feet of the marauder, who was still busy with the fence wires.

Raising my gun to my shoulder, I shouted:

"Hands up there! I've got you!"

There was a half-stifled yell. The robber leaped away from the fence and fell headlong in the gutter. Then, before I could say "Jack Robinson," he was up and running with all his might across the road and into the alfalfa-field beyond.

I followed with leveled gun, and yelling for him to stop and surrender; but he went on faster than ever, running in zigzag lines, doubtless hoping to avoid the charge of shot I was threatening to send after him,

and increasing the distance between us every moment.

I think I could have hit him if I had fired, but I wanted to take him alive and bring him before Ellen as a helpless and cowering prisoner; so I stopped shouting, to save my wind, and put on all the speed I had. At once I began to gain on my intended victim, who ran unsteadily, leaping over every shadow as if it were a bottomless bog.

I was just thinking what an advantage I had over him in knowing the ground so well when—*whoosh!*—I went plunging head first into a ditch, clear to the bottom of three feet of muddy water. It was a brand-new ditch, dug by a machine only two days before; and I had forgotten all about it.

Presently I came up, coughing and strangling, and crawled out on the other side, so astonished and bedraggled, and with so much mud and sand in my mouth, that for five or ten seconds I scarcely knew where I was. I had a vague idea that the whole thing was a nightmare.

But the chill of that water was certainly no dream, as, with the shivers playing tag up and down my spine and my teeth chattering like a pneumatic riveter, I very soon decided. Then I realized also that my gun was lying at the bottom of the ditch, and that without it I might be no match for the robber, if indeed I could ever find him again.

All this time I had forgotten about his automobile; but now the moon came out from behind the clouds, and I could see it there by the bridge, three hundred yards away, with a white-skirted figure that must be Ellen standing near it.

"What a bonehead I am!" I said to myself. "Why didn't I just take that car instead of chasing the thief? That's the way to get square with him!"

So I plunged again into the inky waters of the ditch and groped about on the bottom till I found the gun. Then, clambering out on the side toward the road, I started back to the car, draining the water out of the gun-barrels as I went. At every step my poor drowned shoes made noises like the last few strokes of a suction-pump when the well is running dry.

Then, as I approached the road, I beheld a sight that turned me fairly giddy, and made me wonder once more if I shouldn't hear the alarm-clock ringing pretty soon.

Ellen Gardner was talking with a man by the side of the car. That man was no other than the thief I had so disastrously chased across the field! While I was still a hundred yards away, the man climbed into the car, *Ellen got in after him, and they drove away at full speed toward Pomona.*

III

FLABBERGASTED—that's what I was. Such words as "astonished" and "dumfounded" don't half tell it. The man who waked up in the morning to find a giraffe looking into his chamber window, or the people in Jules Verne's story who were snatched up off the earth by a passing comet, had nothing on me in the way of experiencing surprise. My jaw fell open, my legs crumpled under me, and I sat right down in the grass.

Ellen Gardner had run away with the robber. Was she in league with him, then? And had she planned to carry off my Chanticleer in that flivver now vanishing over the rise half a mile away?

No, that couldn't possibly be. If it were so, why did she set me on to the robber as soon as he appeared? I might have shot him when he refused to surrender, and then where would she have been? Besides, I knew that Ellen Gardner never would be mixed up in anything like that. And yet—I had caught her red-handed in my chicken-house. What in the world—

At this point I scrambled to my feet and made the best of my way back to the house. The problem was away beyond my power to solve, and I was cold and wet and miserable, and quite sure that I had been made a fool of.

I stumbled into the kitchen, lit up the burner in the gas-oven, and proceeded to strip off my soaked and muddy clothes and get into some dry ones. This done, I sat down in front of the oven to get warm and think things over.

It was after two o'clock, and there was no use going to bed, for I knew I couldn't sleep until the question was settled somehow. I reviewed the whole nightmarish thing forward and backward and crosswise, and still couldn't make either head or tail of it.

Was Ellen Gardner one of these dual personalities—a *Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde*—by day a respectable poultry-keeper, and by night a thief and adventuress? Or had I gone dippy and imagined half of what I

had just been through? On the whole, the latter explanation seemed to be the more probable.

After a while it got nice and warm in the room. The house and all its surroundings were perfectly still, and the little clock on the mantel ticked very calmly and soothingly. It is possible that I dozed off for a minute or two, or I might have been very deeply immersed in thought. Anyway, when the telephone-bell, which was about two feet from the back of my head, sent out a vicious *b-r-r-r-r-r-r*, I jumped right up out of my chair and banged my shin on the oven door.

"Thunderation!" I yelled.

The telephone wasn't feezed a bit, and answered right back with another ring that was longer and louder than the first. I grabbed off the receiver in a frenzy, but before I could say a word a cool, sweet voice came over the wire:

"Hello, Raymond!" it said.

It was the voice of Ellen Gardner.

I opened my mouth three times before any words came; then I said:

"Hello! Er—is that you, Ellen?"

"Sure thing!" said Ellen. "Glad you hadn't gone to bed. Now listen. You go over to my place and get my car and drive in here and get me. I'm at the hotel in Pomona."

"Where?" I gasped.

"In the lobby of the Southland Hotel. You know where that is. Now run along like a good boy. Good-by!"

I hung up the receiver and reached for my coat and hat in a complete mental fog. Too late I remembered that I ought to have been very dignified and stern; but that's always the way with me. I can always think of splendid come-backs a day or two afterward.

IV

HALF an hour later I drove into the yard of the hotel. When I entered the lobby, Ellen rose and greeted me exactly as if I had come to take her home after a meeting of the Women's Club. She said good night to the night clerk—I thought he looked much less sleepy than night clerks generally do—and we were soon on our way toward home.

I drove in stately silence, being determined that Ellen should offer explanations. In this she did not entirely disappoint me, for, as we crossed the railroad-tracks and

headed for the open country, she asked casually:

"Do you know who that man was that I came into town with?"

"No, I don't."

"It was Porter Greenwich. He'd been on a fishing-trip up San Gabriel Cañon with Guy Tomlinson, and he was as drunk as a lord."

"Drunk?"

"That's just what he was. Oh, *won't* he just get a letter from me to-morrow? He's told me over and over again that he was a teetotaler; and now I know he's told me lots of other lies, too. Oh, he'll hear from me!"

"And was he trying to steal our chickens?"

"Steal nothing! He and Guy had a fight somewhere, and Porter got a black eye. It seems that Guy wanted to go after more contraband, but Porter wanted to bring me the fish he'd caught, as a present. There were three of them, each about four inches long. Porter and Guy made up after their fight, but then Guy disappeared somehow. Porter didn't know what had become of him, and he'd been driving around for hours, trying to find the way to our place. He was going to leave the fish on my veranda. When we saw him, he was trying to open what he thought was our front gate."

"Did he think I was a constable?"

"No, he thought you were a highwayman. He told me three times over on the way in town—before he went to sleep—that he'd had an awful day. He'd been almost arrested, and he'd been hit in the eye, and finally he'd been chased by a robber who tried to shoot him."

"Where is he now?"

"Sitting in his car in his own garage, where I left him. I hooked the door behind him, but he can climb out of the window, when he's sober; or, if he can't do that, he can holler for help. It's all one to me as long as he's not driving that car around the streets in a way that might kill a lot of inoffensive people and land him in the penitentiary."

I made no reply to this, for I was thinking deeply.

We drove on for miles amid the fragrant orange-groves and lanes of eucalyptus. Her story done, Ellen sat quietly beside me, sometimes yawning sleepily, and sometimes humming a little tune. As we passed Tam-

pico Reservoir, she began to whistle "Listen to the Mocking-Bird."

At this I could contain myself no longer.

"Ellen Gardner," I burst forth, "either you're a splendid actress or — or — something! The man to whom you are engaged has just made an awful fool of himself, and—"

Ellen laid her hand on my arm. It was too dark for me to see her eyes clearly, but I knew from her voice that they were sparkling.

"Raymond," she said, "this is the luckiest thing for me that ever happened. I've been looking for a good excuse to break my engagement for—well, for three or four months. He's the handsomest man I ever knew, but I've been feeling more and more that I couldn't trust him. I just *knew* he was an awful liar, but I couldn't prove a thing. It was just driving me wild, and now I'm rid of him for good. Why, I feel as if I'd dropped some terrible burden from my shoulders!"

I drove on in silence. I was wondering at myself. I couldn't make it out at all. I was happier than I'd ever been in my life; and I was worried and troubled, too. It seemed as if something had happened that was perfectly wonderful for me, but just how I couldn't make out.

We turned into the El Cano road. I was still wondering and questioning. There was just a little daylight now, and I could see Ellen's profile clearly. I had never realized before how beautiful it was.

We were within two miles of home when a memory stabbed me like a knife. The girl beside me was a thief! I had caught her red-handed in my chicken-coop! What in the world had driven her to it?

The whirl of questions and surmises in my mind had me worse confused than ever; and I wasn't giving proper attention to my steering. Several times we bumped needlessly over stones or ruts.

Perhaps telepathy or something gave Ellen an inkling of my thoughts. She hadn't spoken for quite a while, but now she said gravely:

"How many chickens did you have in your prize coop, Raymond?"

"Six," I answered promptly. "Chanticleer and five pullets."

"Well, when we get there, it'll be daylight. Let's go out and see if they're all there."

I said no more, but let the car out a little.

The light was better, and I certainly was in a hurry.

V

THE sun was just peeking over the horizon as we drove into the yard. Ellen led the way to the chicken-house. The door stood open, just as we had left it; but the wire enclosure inside kept the chickens from straying. They were still on the roost; and I went right in to look them over.

I counted them twice, then stood looking at Ellen in amazement.

"Why, there are *nine* of them here!"

"Yes—that's what I thought."

"Nine of them! They couldn't get in from the other yards."

"No," said Ellen demurely.

I stood helplessly staring at a sack on the floor, on which had been stenciled the words:

E. O. GARDNER, ISTRIA, CALIFORNIA

Ellen burst out laughing. She laughed till the tears ran down her face, and she caught hold of a projecting beam for support.

"Oh, you big, blind man!" she gasped at last. "You had six chickens here, and now you've got nine. Who stole your chickens? That's the question!"

At last a great light broke over my mental landscape.

"Ellen," I cried, "you were *bringing chickens in here!*"

"Bravo! You've got it at last!"

She laughed again like mad. Her eyes were just wicked through the tear-drops.

"But what—what in the world—"

"I'll tell you what, Raymond," said Ellen, wiping her eyes. "You didn't have a ghost of a show of winning a prize at Pomona. You don't really know the points yet—only what you get out of a book. Your Chanticleer won't point up seventy-five, and there are lots of others that'll do ninety. The pullets aren't any better, really. You have to be in the fancy a long time before you get hold of these things. You didn't know; and it's no wonder. Now I've raised a thousand white Leghorns this summer, for layers and market. I don't bother any more with the fancy; but out of the whole lot I had one cockerel and two pullets that really had the class. Honestly, they're as good as anything that'll be at Pomona. Now I can tell my chickens as

far as I can see them when there's anything special about them; but you can hardly do that at all. Don't you remember what an awful time you had finding Chanticleer that time he got mixed in with the others? Well, last night I picked out my three *real* ones, put them into a bag, and sneaked over here a little after midnight. I was going to take Chanticleer and two pullets out of your coop, and you'd never have known the difference in the world. Then you might have gone ahead and won some prizes at Pomona."

"And I—I came awfully near shooting you!" I gasped.

"Yes, I was scared for fair. I didn't know how I was going to straighten you out, either. Then that car came and drove everything else out of my head."

"Ellen!" I said humbly. "Oh, Ellen! Can you ever forgive me?"

"Why, of course, you big goose! Why wouldn't I?"

A beam of sunlight came through the dusty window. Ellen blushed beautifully. She was far and away the sweetest thing I had ever seen. Another great light appeared in my mind.

"Ellen!" I said. Now I had both hands on her shoulders, and was looking straight into those dark-brown eyes. "You knew I was going away if I didn't win any prizes at Pomona, and you took all this trouble to fix things so that I could win!"

Ellen nodded, and looked at the buttons on my coat.

"You've been a pretty good neighbor," she said; "and I didn't want you to do anything you'd be sorry for."

"Well, I'm not going to be a neighbor any more," I cried. "I'm going to be something better than that. Oh, Ellen, I want you with all my might! I want you for mine!"

Ellen looked up roguishly.

"Tell me, Raymond, have you just found it out?"

"Yes—isn't it wonderful? Who would ever have thought it?"

I had passed an arm about her neck, and her speech was obstructed for half a minute. As soon as she could, she answered:

"Why, I would, Raymond—and I did, long ago!"

So that's the way I became a prize-winner.

TO MME. JUMEL

Of all the wind-blown dust of faces fair,
Had I a god's reanimating breath,
Thee like a perfumed torch in the dim air
Lethean and the eyeless halls of death
Would I relume! The cresset of thine hair,
Furiously bright, should stream across the gloom,
And thy deep violet eyes again should bloom.

Methinks that but a pinch of thy wild dust,
Blown back to flame, would set our world on fire;
Thy face, amid our timid counsels thrust,
Would light us back to glory and desire,
And swords flash forth that now ignobly rust.
Maenad and muse, upon thy lips of flame
Madness too wise might kiss a clod to fame!

Like musk the charm of thee in the gray mold
That lies on bygone traffickings of state,
Transformed a moment by that head of gold,
Touching the paltry hour with splendid fate;
To "write the Constitution"—'twere a cold,
Dusty, and bloomless immortality,
Without that last wild dying thought of thee!

Richard Le Gallienne

Passports to Paradise

THE STORY OF A CANADIAN REAL-ESTATER WHO HAD A
CONSCIENCE

By John Holden

PROBABLY Mr. Pim would not have got the job at all had not the real-estater been so anxious to hire a window-worker.

Building lots situated anywhere and everywhere were selling like bread in a famine. People were real-estate crazy. Alberta's sudden transformation from a grassy waste into an agricultural empire, with the consequent springing up of new towns like daisies in a meadow, had lured large and small investors from the ends of the earth. The topic of sudden fortunes made, and to be made, was on every one's tongue. On Real Estate Row, in the capital city of the province, sidewalk salesmen who could convincingly bark the merits of the town lots shown on blue-prints in the windows were in huge demand.

Mr. Pim feared that he could not make good as a barker. He was not accustomed to barking. He did not seem able to get the proper volume of sound into his naturally thin voice, and his thirty-five years of Eastern experience as a bookkeeper was not conducive to the bold bearing that seemed so necessary in his new occupation.

Furthermore, he did not know whether Wabiscaw lots were really a desirable investment or not. On that account, his praise of them was perhaps not so convincing as it might have been.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Pim was dubious about the advisability of investing money in lots of any description. Had he not lost his own hard-earned savings in Alberta real estate? Back East a silver-tongued salesman had convinced him that money invested in a certain prairie town would double and treble like rabbits in clover. The salesman was right about the growth of the place, too; but inasmuch as Mr. Pim's lots were situated in a swamp

three miles from the town's business section, they had not doubled and trebled in value. Indeed, they had not advanced at all, and were not likely to do so, even should the place become a second Calgary or Edmonton.

Mr. Pim had not known that his lots were located three miles out. He thought they were just off the main street, where he could perhaps build a book-store or a motion-picture theater and settle down to a comfortable old age. The salesman had, in fact, made a verbal statement, though not a written one, to that effect. When he tried to sell his lots, Mr. Pim found that their value was practically nothing; and thus he found himself in the humiliating position of having to work at anything that offered.

"Buy a lot in Wabiscaw, ma'am? The future big city of northern Alberta!"

Mr. Pim barked his selling talk at a lady and her young son who had paused in front of the window to view a gorgeous panoramic painting of the coming metropolis—not the log-cabined Hudson's Bay Company settlement which actually existed, of course, but an extensive city of factories and sky-scrapers which represented the real-estater's opinion of what Wabiscaw would become in a few years.

"Remember, lady, ten years ago you could 'a' bought lots on this very street for fifty dollars, and now they're worth about fifty thousand," urged Mr. Pim. "What's the use of slaving all your life for a mere competence—"

A vinegarish glare cut into the little bookkeeper's sensitive soul like acid as the lady breezed off with her protesting offspring in tow.

"Mebbe I didn't give her the right line o' talk," muttered Mr. Pim to himself.

"Should 'a' left out that part about slaving. Mebbe she don't slave."

A railroader, from one of the numerous construction camps that were girdling Alberta with steel, lumbered by.

"Sir, would you like to invest—"

"What's that? Tryin' to get fresh with me, you pup? Makin' fun o' me 'cause you see I'm dead broke an' all in?"

Mr. Pim apologized.

"Dear me!" he muttered to himself. "I don't ever seem to say the right thing!"

During the next half-hour the little office man practised his limping salesmanship on several persons. He did no business, but was beginning to feel a trifle more at ease when a hard-faced and half-intoxicated citizen stopped in front of the window.

"Sell you a lot in Wabiscaw, sir? Fastest-growing town in Alberta. Be a city soon. Three different railroads building in there—bound to make it a distributing center. You know how Edmonton and Calgary started; mere villages a few years ago—"

"You bet Wabiscaw's a fast-growin' town!" the citizen agreed. "Wha' you sellin'?"

Thus encouraged, Mr. Pim gave what he supposed was accurate information.

"Riverview Heights," he replied. "Best residential section of Wabiscaw. All lots high and dry, inside town limits, only five blocks from the post-office—"

"You're a liar!" A hairy fist lunged out menacingly, and Mr. Pim retreated almost through his window. "Damned blood-sucker! Suspicioned you was a crook the minute I laid eyes on you. Got it written all over you. Your rotten lots are more'n a mile from the post-office, an' half of them in a swamp, at that. I know. I live at Wabiscaw. Good town, too, if you cursed real-estaters don't ruin it. D'ye know where I've a mind to put you?"

Mr. Pim tried to retreat inside the office, but to his amazement he found the door locked.

"In jail, you swindler!" The threatening fist described little circles under Mr. Pim's nose. "That's where all you real-estate grafters belong. Don't let me ketch you at it again!"

As abruptly as he had begun his tirade, the irate one swung off down the street, muttering dire threats.

Mr. Pim tried the door again, and this time was able to enter.

"I guess I'll resign, sir," he told his employer. "I can't stand out there and tell lies."

"Resign is right!" The real-estater spat contemptuously. "You're no good as a salesman. You don't know how to handle people. You don't know how to make statements in a diplomatic way, so people can't come back at you. You shouldn't 'a' told that man our lots are five blocks from the post-office; you should 'a' said 'a few blocks from the post-office.' You're a failure, that's what! I don't owe you nothin', 'cause you didn't do no business. Close the door from the outside, please."

Jobless once more, Mr. Pim walked up Real Estate Row like a rube past circus side-shows.

"Yessir, I must be a failure; I surely must be," he mused despairingly. "And it's my own fault, too. I've had chantes to make my pile, but I was too darned pernickity. Yessir, I been too honest for my own good!"

Presently he paused in front of a restaurant. It was late in the afternoon, but Mr. Pim had had no lunch. He had recently read at the public library, where he spent many of his evenings, that hearty lunches are harmful to health and pocketbook alike; and inasmuch as his constitution was delicate and his pocketbook even more so, he had decided to be governed by good advice.

He entered and ordered a modest fifty-cent meal.

"Pie?" queried the waitress.

"Yes," said Mr. Pim.

She brought it, and charged him sixty cents.

"The bill of fare says a reg'lar dinner for fifty cents," Mr. Pim protested mildly. "All the reg'lar dinners I ever heard of had pie thrown in."

"Pie's extra," snapped the waitress, and thus the matter was settled.

"Seems like somebody is always trying to do a person nowadays," muttered Mr. Pim to himself.

At his furnished room it appeared that somebody was trying to "do" him again. The verbal contract under which he had engaged the room plainly specified that heat was to be furnished during the cold spring evenings. The early evening had turned quite chilly, but there was no more heat than there is in an igloo.

Mr. Pim made no protest this time. He

was becoming accustomed to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

"I'll just walk down to the newspaper office, to get warm, and see if there's any 'help wanted' ads," he told himself.

II

OUTSIDE again, an arctic wind moaned dolorously and sifted through the little bookkeeper's inadequate clothing like a myriad sharp needles. Old pages of newspapers flitted here and there like gray ghosts in the twilight. The somber veil of night was swiftly unfurling over the leaden gauze of the evening.

Mr. Pim had almost reached the business district when a blanketed bundle on a stone step claimed his attention. Undoubtedly it was a human being—a woman, perhaps. With the keen sympathy of the unfortunate toward others still more unfortunate, he paused to look. Yes, the bundle was human; he could make out features through a slit in the blanket.

"Hello!" he said, and poked an investigating finger.

"Got a match?"

Mr. Pim recoiled as if he had been struck. The features that were now revealed were those of a strong man. With trembling words of apology, the old bookkeeper produced the desired article.

"Thanks, old-timer—wait a minute!" The blanketed one produced cigars. "Have one?"

Mr. Pim took a cigar, marveling as he did so at the spectacle of a virile young man curled up in a blanket and seated on a door-step.

"I can't make out what you're sitting there for," he said. "Are all the hotels full up? Because, if they are, I know where you might get a room."

The blanketed sitter laughed boisterously, as if some tremendous joke was being perpetrated.

"Ha, ha! That's a good one! Pitying me because I'm sitting out in the cold, when I'm huggin' myself with joy 'cause I'm the luckiest guy in Alberta! Listen!" The man's tone was joyously peremptory. "You look like a good scout. You'd do something for a guy, though you seem kind of up against it yourself; so I'm going to tell you something. Want to know what I'm here for?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is the Dominion Land Office

—see? I'm sitting here all night so I'll have first chance, when the office opens in the morning, to file on a homestead that 'll be worth fifty thousand dollars the minute it's proved up."

"You'll get land worth that much money free?"

Mr. Pim sat down beside the other man, his own misfortune forgotten. Here was romance! Here, at his very feet, was being enacted one of those marvelous Western dramas which, back in the prosaic East, had flamed his imagination and his hopes. Here was one of those Heaven-blessed humans whom Providence places in this cruel world to keep alive the spark of hope in despairing hearts.

Then something rose up in the little man's withered throat and half choked him. Fortune never had favored him, never would favor him.

"I—I looked up the records to see what land could be had free," Mr. Pim said; "but none of it was any good. Too far from a railroad—fifty miles and more out. I couldn't grow grain and haul it fifty miles."

"My homestead won't be fifty miles out; it won't be one mile out." The blanketed one waved his cigar grandiloquently. "Of course, a guy has got to use the old bean to get next to a cinch like this. They don't happen every day, or even every month. You see, it's like this—the G. T. P. is building through to the coast. Here and there they've got to have division points, and it's those points that are going to grow into the big towns and cities. Nobody knows where they're going to be, except the wise guys—get me? Me, I'm a wise guy. Got a friend in the chief engineer's office, back in Toronto. He tips me off where there'll be a division town-site. The location is all settled, signed, and sealed, though there ain't a steel rail within a hundred miles of it yet. So I looks up the records and finds that the quarter-section adjoining the town-site can be homesteaded. I examines the ground, and it's good ground. So there you are! To-morrow morning I'll file on it. In three years, when I've proved up, the town will be built, and there I'll be with a hundred and sixty good acres right next to it. If the boom keeps up, I can sell it as building lots for a big fortune; if not, farm land adjoining a town is worth a small fortune, anyhow."

"It seems too good to be true!" The white-haired little bookkeeper smiled wanly. "There's them that are fortunate and them that aren't," he said gloomily.

"Meanin' yourself, hey? Well, how d'ye know you're so darned unfortunate? Mebbe, when you poked your finger at my blanket to see if you could do me a good turn, you were pokin' your nose right into good fortune. What if I should tell you that there's *another* quarter-section adjoining the town-site that's open to entry—huh?"

Mr. Pim's eyes widened; his mouth dropped open; his thin hands shook.

"You mean you'd let me—"

"Sure! Why not? You meant to do me a good turn; why shouldn't I do you a good turn? So you just sit yourself right down here beside me, old-timer, and in the morning you waltz up to the counter behind me and file on the second homestead—see? It 'll be worth—well, mebbe not fifty thousand, like mine is, but forty thousand, anyhow. Not a bad night's work, huh?"

"Merciful Heavens, has my chance come at last?" Mr. Pim breathed a little prayer of thanksgiving.

"I got an extra blanket you can have," said his benefactor. "You may get a bit cold before morning, but—"

"Oh, I ain't cold; I won't get cold. I'm warm as toast. There's nothing can keep a man warm like good luck!" Mr. Pim babbled on like a child. "And after it looked like every hand was turned against me, too, because I was too trusting, and wouldn't do wrong. I never seen the beat of it before I met you—everybody tryin' to do me, everybody tryin' to make me do other people. It looked like there was nobody but cheats in the whole city. The man who sold me lots in the first place—he was a plain swindler, but so smart I couldn't do nothing to him. Then this real-estater I was working for to-day—he expected me to tell lies to people, an' just as good as fired me when I wouldn't. Then I went to a restaurant, and got cheated again when I had to pay extra for pie, when anybody knows that pie ought to be included in a reg'lar dinner. Then the furnished room I got—no heat when there ought to be heat. Cheat, cheat, all the time! An' then I met you—something for nothing; a passport to paradise, you might say. Even yet I can hardly believe it!"

"Not entirely for nothing," reminded Bill Rankin—such being the homesteader's name. "You've got to build yourself a little cabin. I'll help you with yours and you can help me with mine. Then you've got to do some clearing and planting and fencing. A homesteader needs a bit of money, but you can earn it. I'll hire you to work for me now and then. You can leave your homestead six months every year and go away to work. You can even work in town during your period of residence, if you sleep on your place every night; then you could hire all your duties done. When your time is nearly up, any bank will loan you money to clinch your title."

"All that 'll be fun!" Mr. Pim's words were interspersed with little giggles of happy laughter. "Why, d'ye know, a place of my own to work on is what I've wanted all my life! A place where I can walk about, knowin' that nobody's got a right to stop me, an' listen to my cows a moo'in', an' my sheep baa-baa'in', an' little piggies a squealin', an' all. My daughter's husband would come out and help me, too, I guess—a fine fellow, but can't seem to get ahead on a rented farm in Ontario. Then I'll have my grandchildren an' all—when it looked like I'd just naturally have to wind up in the poorhouse or be a burden on relations. I tell you, Mr. Rankin, it's heaven!"

Mr. Pim babbled on, the chilly night forgotten in the ecstasy of his good fortune, until, along about midnight, his rejuvenated voice grew less and less distinct as he drifted happily into dreamland.

"He's a good old scout—make a good neighbor," muttered Bill Rankin to himself, as he wrapped another protecting fold of blanket around little Mr. Pim.

III

A COLD night had closed down on the city like an inverted black pot. Save for the corner arc-lamp that fizzed and spluttered in its efforts to combat the inky darkness, all was quiet. An occasional hurrying pedestrian stared at the blanketed pair on the door-step.

Bill Rankin kept awake. He knew that more than once land-office squatters have gone to sleep to awaken in the gutter, with wide-awake and husky usurpers in their places. There would be nothing of that in his young life, Rankin vowed, as he fought off sleep and flexed his strong arms in preparation for possible use of them.

Toward morning two men stopped to survey the blanketed couple.

"Anything doing?" one of them queried of Rankin. "Something good opening up, maybe?"

"Nothin' worth mentioning," replied Rankin, who did not wish to start a rush that might prejudice his and his friend's chances to get to the counter first.

"There must be, or you'd not be sitting up all night. Guess I'll just stick around and see what's what in the morning."

"Suit yourself," said Rankin.

The two men sat down. Early morning passers-by, keenly alert for the good things that occasionally turned up at the land office, decided that four men in line must mean something, so they too joined the waiters. At six o'clock several such persons were in line.

"All meaning to file, and chances are that hardly any of them has seen what he's going to file on. I wonder what Pim would say to that!"

Suddenly Rankin sat bolt upright, as a new thought struck him. He looked at his companion, who still slept as blissfully as a child on Christmas morning.

"I wonder if the old boy will be too finicky to file!" he muttered.

He shook the ex-bookkeeper gently.

"Wake up," he admonished. "Morning's here."

Mr. Pim rubbed his eyes and looked around.

"Then it's true!" he exclaimed. "I wasn't just dreaming. I *am* going to get a fine piece of land of my own to spend my old age on?"

"Sure you are, if you've got sense. But there's one little point I want to explain, so you'll have your answer all ready when the land agent asks you the question."

"Yes?" There was a scared look in Mr. Pim's eyes. "What's the little point?"

Rankin hesitated; he feared that Mr. Pim *would* be too finicky.

"Well, this is government land, you know," he began. "You know how governments are—all bound up in red tape, like a Christmas box. When you deal with a government, you're supposed to observe a thousand and one senseless little technicalities that no business company on earth would ever think of. That's what comes of letting lawyers make a country's laws. People pretend to observe all the silly little rules, of course, but actually they don't.

They can't; government officials don't expect them to. This is a practical world, and practical people have got to get around senseless rules the best way they can. You see all the people in this line?"

"Y-yes," quavered Mr. Pim. "What are you driving at?"

"These people here—they're all going to file on land close to mine because they've got a hunch that I know where an important town-site is to be located. It happens that they're right, and they'll all win out; but, whether right or wrong, they'd all file, anyway."

"Yes—they'd all file, anyway."

"Well, it's a cinch that most of them have never seen the land they're going to file on. They'll just take it up blindly on the strength of its location."

"Yes—they'll take it up blindly."

Rankin dreaded to go on.

"Well, they shouldn't. The idiotic government has a crazy little rule that you've got to look at the piece of land you intend to file on."

Mr. Pim gasped.

"You mean I—I've got to swear—"

"Yes—you've got to swear that you've seen the land you mean to file on. Just thought I'd tell you, so you'll have your answer ready."

"O-oh, my God!" Mr. Pim rocked back and forth, his head in his hands. "Oh, I knew there'd be some catch! I knew it was too good to be true!"

Rankin placed his hand gently on the little man's shoulder.

"Now look here, Pim," he said. "You mustn't let a little thing like that bother you. This is a practical world, and people have got to act according. I know you're straight as a string, and you don't like to swear to a lie; but in this case it's all right. You won't be cheating anybody. If you don't claim the land, another man who hasn't seen it will. What's it matter to the government who gets it? The agent won't try to trip you up and make you out a perjurer; he never does. Do you think I'd let a harmless lie stand between me and a fortune? Not much! It's only by chance that I've seen my homestead; darn little difference it would make if I hadn't! So, now, be sensible, man—be sensible!"

Mr. Pim's features had sheeted to a leaden pallor. His lips sagged, his eyes closed; he slacked back against the land-office door like a half-filled sack.

"But I can't," he moaned. "An oath—on the holy Bible—a lie to God Almighty!" He broke down and shed tears of bitter disappointment. "Oh, if I'd only known!" he wailed. "Perhaps even last night I could have gone out!"

"That wouldn't have done any good," soothed Rankin. "These homesteads are forty miles from here, and there are no roads. It took me nearly two days, traveling horseback over rotten trails, to get there."

He tried another line of persuasion.

"If you could only see the quarter-section I have in mind for you, I'll bet you'd not hesitate," he argued. "Right on the Saskatchewan River, near a big horseshoe bend. My place is bordered by the river on the south, and by the prettiest little stream you ever saw on the west. Yours is on the river, too—on the opposite side of the railroad town-site, commencing half a mile up from the stream. Finest view you ever saw in your life! And the land—rich soil, level, most of it all ready for the plow, the rest wooded just enough to give you fence-posts and firewood."

"I can't—I can't do it!" the little man moaned.

"It's the chance of a lifetime."

"I can't!"

"It means independence for your old age."

"No, no!"

Rankin's tone became more peremptory.

"Now, look here, old chap," he said.

"I hate to say nasty things, but it looks like I got to. Do you realize just what your position in life is?"

Mr. Pim's lips moved, but made no sound. He was staring unseeingly at the sidewalk.

"You're a failure, that's what! You're all in as a worker; you're two steps from the poorhouse; you're one of these righteous jackasses that get buried in paupers' graves!"

"I—I can't help it!"

"All right—suit yourself, but don't blame me."

There was a long silence.

"I don't know what's come over the world," the little man commenced to mumble, half to himself. "It's cheat, cheat, everywhere! The man who sold me worthless lots—the man I wouldn't lie for—the restaurant—my cold room—and now you!"

"It's the modern Western spirit that

rules hereabouts," said Rankin. "You got to step lively or you'll get left. In a new country like this it's a case of grab, grab, grab. Not that there ain't more honest than dishonest people in Alberta; but the crowd of crooks that go rushin' into every new field where big money can be made makes it necessary for the honest ones to keep pretty wide awake."

"Well, if modern Western methods means taking advantage of people every chance you get, I guess I'll go back East—if I can get there!"

Mr. Pim dragged himself up from his seat and looked around uncertainly, like a babe in a wilderness. Rankin put his hand on his arm.

"Wait a while; maybe you'll change your mind."

"I won't change my mind."

"Well, stick around, anyhow. Maybe you'll have a chance to sell your place in line later on."

Mr. Pim sat down again, and for five minutes or more nothing was said. The white-haired failure sat wrapped in gloomy introspection. Rankin sat, pounding his fist into his open palm and thinking with all the vigor of his keen young mind.

Others in line who had overheard the argument exchanged cynical comments and looked pityingly at the old fool who would sacrifice a fortune because of a government technicality.

IV

THE sun had risen on a glorious spring morning. The air was as invigorating as wine. Green leaves rippled on the big tree in front of the land-office, and little birds trilled the ecstasy of living. Passers-by smiled encouragement to the weary waiters; and the waiters, sure now that they were on the track of something good, smiled back. Every one was happy but Mr. Pim.

The time was half past six o'clock. In two and a half hours the office doors would open.

Suddenly Rankin came out of his reverie with a jerk.

"Modern Western methods, eh?" he ejaculated softly. "The old boy's very words! I wonder if he's game?" He studied Mr. Pim again. "I'm betting he is," he decided—then sprang into action.

"You!" he called to a passing boy. "Will you hold down a place in this line till nine o'clock for two dollars?"

The boy would, and signed a penciled agreement to that effect, which was witnessed by a policeman who had come with the evident intention of preventing disorder when the doors opened.

Rankin turned swiftly to Mr. Pim.

"I want you to do something for me," he said. "I want you to carry a message to a fellow and then do precisely what he tells you to do. Hurry back when you've finished; the boy will hold your place. Will you do that?"

"I'll do anything you ask that's honest," said the little bookkeeper.

"Officer, will you call a taxi, please?"

As he spoke, Rankin was scribbling furiously in a note-book. He placed some bank-notes between the leaves, clamped them there with a rubber band, scribbled a name and address on the plain paper cover, then thrust the note-book into Mr. Pim's hands.

"Take that to the address given," he ordered. "Then do what you're told to do, no matter if you're scared to death. Here's money for the taxi-driver. Pay him extra to drive fast, and make him wait to bring you back. Understand?"

"Yes."

The taxi arrived. Mr. Pim jumped into it, and was off.

"He's a good old scout," Rankin told the officer. "Too impractical and honest to ever amount to much, but honest men are good men to know."

"You said it," agreed the officer.

An hour passed—two hours. Rankin began to look worried. The success of his plan necessitated Mr. Pim's arrival before the land-office opened in fifteen minutes.

Then, eight minutes before the doors were scheduled to open, the taxi whirled up and Mr. Pim jumped out.

He was a new man. He moved with speed and energy. His eyes were alight with joyous anticipation.

"All right?" queried Rankin.

"Right as rain!" exulted the man who had been a failure all his life. "I saw the river and the little stream and the two homesteads just as you described them. There was no mistaking the location, on account of the horseshoe bend in the river just below there. Dandy places they are, too, though of course I couldn't examine 'em any too well, travelin' so fast that way. But I looked at mine long enough to be able to swear I've seen it, you bet! Could 'a' seen it better, I guess, only that danged airplane fellow you sent me to flipped his machine around the minute we got there and streaked back for home like greased lightnin'. I tell you, that was a grand and generous idea—sending me forty miles out to those homesteads in a flyin'-machine! What ever made you think of that?"

Rankin laughed boisterously as he wrung Mr. Pim's hand.

"Oh, just my modern Western spirit, I guess," he said.

THE NATIVITY

'Twas Christmas eve, and bitter cold;

The wind had ceased to blow;

I saw a cottage by the road

Half-buried in the snow.

An upper window showed a light,

And over field and fen

A joyous peal of bells announced

The birth of Christ again.

Lo, from the lighted window came

A new-born baby's cry,

And o'er the cottage roof, behold,

A star shone in the sky—

Perhaps the very same that stood

O'er Bethlehem of yore,

For Christ in every little child

Is born on earth once more.

Minna Irving

The Power of Will

AND THE INGENIOUS APPLICATION OF A CHRISTMAS ADVERTISEMENT

By Elmer Brown Mason

"I DON'T see as you have no call to say that to me, Maybelle." John Williams spoke with dignity.

"I guess a girl's got a right to stand up for her parents, even if they don't ride in no lim'sine with no—no chow-chow dog in their laps!"

"But I didn't hand you no criticism. I just said it was funny for two old people to be goin' down-town to a movie like a couple o' kids."

The man had abandoned his pose of dignity for a tone of querulous pleading.

"I don't see where you got any call to tell *any* member of my family when they can go to the movies," the girl responded promptly.

"What you tryin' to put over on me, Maybelle?" the man demanded, anger replacing pleading in his voice.

"I ain't tryin' to put nothin' over on you, Mist-er Williams," said the girl haughtily. "You don't interest me to no such extent."

"Oh!" said Williams, and glared at her. "Well, what's the answer?"

"Must you be goin'?" suggested Maybelle in her best society manner, gazing at a spot two feet above the young man's head.

"I must," he mimicked her, "seem' that I'm practically thrown out!"

He rose to his feet. Just like that, it happened!

Out in the street, John Williams hunched his shoulders to the cold blast and wished that it had been before the days of prohibition, so that he might soothe his injured feelings with drink, a lot of drink. It suddenly dawned on him that he knew of a place where it might still be procured, in spite of prohibition—at a price. He turned squarely in his tracks, only to turn back

again and hunch his shoulders to the winter wind.

"What's the use of payin' half a buck a throw for rot-gut you don't really want?" he told himself. "There ain't no frail worth makin' a damn fool of yourself over deliberate!"

His inner consciousness promptly informed him that the last part of the sentence was only a bluff—an attempt to minimize his grief. Then he faced the issue squarely. Maybelle had thrown him down deliberately, cruelly; but that made her no less precious and desirable.

Perhaps it was his fault? No, he couldn't honestly believe that. If it was, he could ask for forgiveness, swallow his pride; but it *wasn't* his fault. He hadn't meant to slam them or anything. It had just seemed funny that two old people should go to the movies together, and he had said so.

For a time his thoughts went around in this circle, then broke from it. He'd call up Maybelle Riker at the lunch hour, the next day, and give her a chance to apologize. He would accept any opening to go back to her.

Somewhat comforted, he entered his boarding-house, turned up the gas in the little room which was his by right of eight dollars a week, in advance, and picked up a book. The cover bore the inscription, "The Power of Will."

II

AFTER John Williams left the Riker flat, Maybelle wiped away six large angry tears and assured herself that she was not going to cry. Whereupon she blew her nose and decided that she was very tired, and that it was nice to be alone. When the heads of the family returned, they found her ab-

sorbed in reading that fashion magazine which asserts that its appeal is exclusively to those whose incomes exceed five thousand dollars a year.

"Mr. Williams gone?" queried her mother.

"Yes," answered Maybelle indifferently.

"Swell picture with one of them morals," volunteered Mr. Riker waggishly. He had a reputation for wit in the express office where he worked. "Feller's broke, an' quarrels with his girl, so's he won't have to send her no Christmas present. Finds a hundred-case note on the street an' tries to make up with her. She goes to return the necktie she's bought him for Christmas, an' the clerk gets a crush on her—"

"Father, how many times have I got to tell you not to be always talkin' movie plots?" demanded Mrs. Riker severely, examining her daughter out of wise eyes.

"Aw, her feller's always doin' it, an' I ain't heard her complainin' none," objected the head of the family.

"A good reason why you shouldn't!" snapped his daughter, promptly lining up with her mother. "It's bad enough to hear one feller tell 'em."

"Been scrappin' with him, hey?" surmised Mr. Riker, with unusual acumen for his sex. "Well, you want to watch out. Christmas is only couple o' weeks ahead;" and he dived for his own room.

Had John Williams been born to the purple, he would have gone to college, specialized on the digamma, and led a uselessly laborious and happy life. Since he came into the world near the East River, where collegiate advantages are in the proportion of zero in the hundred, he went to work. The energy that might have gone into digging up the digamma from the dust of ages went into the study of freight schedules, a weighing of the speed of express *versus* parcel post to remote parts of these United States.

He rose rapidly to the position of chief shipping-clerk of a large mail-order house; did the work of three men, for which he received the salary of four—such are the times—and had a firm hand on the next rung of the commercial ladder. Then he met Maybelle Riker, and business slid rapidly down to second place in his scheme of existence. Nor was he to be blamed. On the contrary, many men envied him—envied especially the thoroughness with which he distanced all rivals.

The girl was so beautiful that it seemed unfair that she should also be unusually capable and even clever. It seemed a painting of the lily for her to hold a responsible and well-paid position with the firm that gets out that bulky volume known as the New York City Directory. As John Williams succinctly put it:

"She's got everythin'—front, bean, an' pep!"

Perhaps it was this same "pep," perhaps it was the strain of the letter S, always the most hated by those who are compiling directories, that had brought about the first rift in the lute. At any rate, the lute had been rifted—rifted when all seemed to be going smoothly, with the peal of wedding-bells ready to break.

It was just two weeks before Christmas, and the mail-order house was seething with industry. Office-boys dumped heaps of shipping-tickets into three baskets marked "IN" on John Williams's desk. The man glanced at them one by one, scribbled the symbol for express, parcel post, or freight in the space left blank for this purpose, and cast them into baskets marked "OUT," which were borne away at regular intervals by other office-boys.

It was work that required concentration, and John Williams barely lifted his head till a bell tinkled for the noon hour, and the flow into the baskets marked "IN" ceased. Hastily scribbling "F" on a ticket for a cottage organ destined for Pickens, South Carolina, and "P.P." on another that called for an ivory manicure set to be despatched to Deer Lodge, Montana, the head shipping-clerk rose to his feet and slipped on coat, overcoat, and hat. Then he crossed the street and shut himself up in a pay telephone-booth.

"Hello, that you, Maybelle?"

"This is Miss Riker," the girl answered, trying to keep a thrill out of her voice.

"This is Mr. John Williams," came over the phone.

"May I ask which Mr. John Williams?" the girl queried. "There's only about a hundred of 'em in the directory."

"Aw, lay off, girly!" his voice pleaded. "I didn't say nothin', last night, but I 'polgize for it, anyway."

"Well—" The girl hesitated. "Well, we'll let it go at that—this time."

"Thank Gawd!" the man answered fervently. "I hoped you'd forgive me easy. Guess it's 'cause Christmas is comin' an' a

certain little girl expects a swell present—well, she's goin' to get it, I'll tell the world!"

Women may classify individuals of the opposite sex as good, bad, handsome, ugly, but they have one generalization which blankets them all:

"Why are men such fools?"

It is a wail rather than a vituperation. Maybelle had received her admirer back into grace, but his first move forced her to hand him something—and hand him something she did! When John Williams emerged, perspiring, from the telephone-booth, it was with the complete consciousness that he had received his.

III

MRS. RIKER kissed her daughter a hurried good-by, then summoned her spouse to return up the stairs.

"I'm late as it is, mommer," he complained from the floor below.

"I ain't your mommer! I married you—I didn't adopt you," she called down to him. "Though Heaven knows you're more trouble to me than six or seven children. You come right back here an' get your muffler!"

Mr. Riker came. After the muffler had been adjusted, he kissed his wife under the chin. She slapped him, but did not look displeased. The door of the apartment closed.

Mrs. Riker went about her house-work, humming as she passed from task to task. When she reached Maybelle's room the humming ceased, however, and her face took on a look of concentration. All was not well with her daughter, and Mrs. Riker, though she would not have acknowledged it to her own husband, was perfectly conscious that the girl's unhappiness was her own fault.

"If I'd been so highy-tighty in my young days, I'd never 'a' had a husband," she soliloquized. "How girls do change—an' I don't think it's for the better, neither. Well, what to do?"

She passed into the living-room and sat down in the red plush rocker, her dusting-rag still in her hands. It was perfectly obvious to her that her daughter's happiness depended upon one John Williams; but he didn't know it, and she hadn't the slightest intention of enlightening him. Neither had she any intention of letting things rest as they were.

Her eyes roamed about the room in search of inspiration. A letter on the table caught her glance. It was an alluring letter—a long envelope with a team of reindeer speeding across it. The Santa Claus in the sleigh behind had his arm around a white-haired old lady who was smiling happily off into space.

Mrs. Riker picked up the letter, opened it, and read the contents:

DEAR SIR OR MADAM:

The merry Christmastime approaches when all the world is full of good cheer and friendly wishes. Busy man—or woman—as you are, you can add your part to happiness, and that without moving from your home or your office desk. Write on the enclosed form the names of your friends to whom you desire to send Yuletide remembrances. Gift Granny will mail each one a card asking that each one name ten gifts desired. Then Gift Granny will write you or telephone you the lists, and you may select a gift among the ten listed on each card from our splendid stock. It will be sent with your name, and appropriately wrapped for the season, as you indicate, on receipt of check from you covering the cost of your selection.

We call your attention to the fact that the recipients will not know the name of the donor until the gift is actually received on Christmas eve. A real Christmas surprise! A joy-bringer!

With all holiday wishes,

GIFT GRANNY.

In care of Brown & Brown, 999 Broadway.

"Well!" said Mrs. Riker aloud. "It may not do any good, of course, but it ought to start somethin', an' anythin' 's better than nothin'!"

She rose to her feet, and after some search found pen and ink in the medicine-closet in the bath-room. Filling out the card with John Williams's name and address, she put it into an envelope and slipped on her coat and hat to go out for a stamp.

It will be noted that Mrs. Riker did not add her daughter's or her husband's name to the card. Not for worlds would she have given up the annual struggle of selecting family gifts herself.

IV

MOST American youths acquire a certain knowledge of girls during the leisurely period of adolescence. They take, as it were, a graded course in flirtation to prepare them for the high school of wooing.

It was quite otherwise with John Williams. He had been far too busy working. Hence he attacked the serious business of wooing without a proper foundation, and his first reverse caught him without a solu-

tion. He didn't know what to do, and was very unhappy. Of course, during working hours—and they were long ones at this season—his mind was too fully occupied with the problem of deliveries to have room for anything else; but afterward! Well, it was rather awful!

Going home in the evenings was the worst part. John Williams worked late, and when he left the big mail-order house the lights were lit outdoors, bringing into high relief the green leaves and cheerful red berries of the holly-wreaths hanging in the store windows, the glint of tinsel, the glitter of Christmas-tree decorations.

The faces of the passers-by seemed to reflect this holiday light. They were smiling and happy. Of all the world, the man bitterly told himself, he alone was utterly miserable.

Once in his room, he had no desire to go out. The pleasures New York held out made no appeal to him. For sheer want of anything better he turned to "The Power of Will." There was one passage he read over many times:

It is of paramount importance that the individual should examine carefully into what he *thinks* he desires, and be *sure* he really desires it, before he turns the irresistible force of trained will to its acquisition. Attainment should bring the same, or a greater, satisfaction as its *fore-runner*, the struggle for attainment. If it does not, it is not a real desire, or it is one the attainment of which will bring ultimate unhappiness.

The man pondered over this paragraph for two nights, but finally decided it did not apply to his case. He *was* sure!

The next paragraph brought him some comfort:

It must be remembered that once the power of will is working to the attainment of some object, it will continue to work for this purpose as long as it is still desired, and often without the conscious knowledge of the one who so desires. It is not necessary to make physical advances toward this goal. Simply concentrate on its attainment, giving no thought to the *way* of attainment. The power of will, once set in motion, never ceases. It is not necessary for the individual to make a conscious effort.

John Williams accepted this verbatim. He made no attempt to think a way out of his difficulties, but he never ceased to hope for one. He would concentrate, just concentrate. In the mean time he was very unhappy.

Saturday, eight days from Christmas, was a grueling day. John Williams walked

home wearily through the cheerfully decorated streets, his head bowed so as not to see the happiness in the faces of his fellow beings. Wearily he turned the latch-key in the lock of his boarding-house door and glanced at the settee for mail.

There was one letter, and the man was tempted to tear it up without reading at the mere sight of the envelope. It was a long envelope. Across the top hurtled a team of reindeer, behind which careened a sleigh driven by a jolly Santa Claus, his arm around a white-haired old lady who was gazing happily out into space.

"*Some ad!*" the man said disgustedly.

He tore open the envelope, and read:

MY DEAR MR. WILLIAMS:

A friend has asked Gift Granny to write and ask you to make a list of ten gifts, one of which will reach you Christmas eve. Will you please use the enclosed card for this purpose, and mail it to me?

With the season's greetings,

GIFT GRANNY.

In care of Brown & Brown, 999 Broadway.

There was only one person in the world who *might* send John Williams a Christmas gift, only one person in the world from whom he would care to receive one—and that person was Maybelle Riker. His first intuition was to rush to the nearest phone; but he was restrained by the teachings of his favorite text-book, and by the knowledge that there was no telephone in the Rikers' flat.

Instead, he went up to his room and lit the gas. Before him, on the bureau, lay "The Power of Will." For a few moments he looked at it, then got out pen and ink. It was an hour before he had filled in the card:

I don't want no choice of ten things. I want one thing, and this is it—a girl who will let me take care of her, and get her everything she wants, and be good to her, and who won't throw me out when I do some bonehead thing I don't mean to. If I can't have this, I don't want nothing.

Respectfully,

JOHN WILLIAMS.

The man slipped the card into the stamped envelope enclosed for the purpose. Next he put on his hat and coat and hurried to the nearest mail-box, as if in fear that his resolution would not hold. Then he returned to his room.

"The Power of Will" still lay on the bureau. For a few moments he contemplated it with growing irritation. Sudden-

ly, opening the window, he threw the book far out into the street.

V

It was Christmas eve. Maybelle Riker gathered up her bonus check at noon, put on her hat and coat, and left for the day.

As she walked through the streets, she wondered that so many people could be so happy, that every one could be so happy. John Williams was probably happy, too. The thought stabbed her to the heart. In vain she told herself that he was nothing to her, that she hoped he *was* happy. The pretense would not hold. She *hated* him, and she *hoped* he was *miserable*, and she'd have given anything in the world to see him for a minute—yes, even a minute!

The door of her apartment-house was before her. Maybelle opened it and mounted slowly to her family niche among its cliff-dwellers. Her mother opened the door to her impatient knock.

"Off for the day, Maybelle?" she queried.

"Yes," the girl answered listlessly. "I'd just as soon be workin'," she added bitterly. "There ain't no sense in all this Christmas stuff."

"You don't say!" answered her mother belligerently. "You just come in here an' trim this tree. You an' your pa's had a tree for twenty-two years, an' he ain't goin' to miss it now just because he's got a grouchy daughter. I've brought you up right, Maybelle, an'—"

"Yes, ma," the girl answered meekly—so meekly that her mother stared at her in alarm.

"Ain't you feelin' right?" she asked anxiously. "Somethin' on your mind?"

The girl did not answer. She gave her mother one swift look, then buried her face on the maternal bosom.

Mrs. Riker finally wiped away her daughter's tears and settled her on the couch. She offered no words of sympathy, but her lips were firmly set, and the way she put on her hat was a challenge to the whole world.

"I'm goin' to get your pa now," she announced. "You answer the bell, if any one rings. I'm expectin' some holly an' mistletoe. Don't you pay that thievin' dago more'n a dollar—that's the trade I made with him."

On the stairs she paused and opened her hand-bag. Yes, it was there—a pink card

signed "John Williams," with tiny reindeer running across the top. It had come to her three days before in the mail.

"I'll give him one chance. I'll—I'll telephone him," she said aloud between clenched teeth. "Then I'll go an' drag him here by the hair of his head, if he don't take it as he'd ought to!"

Nevertheless Mrs. Riker did not head straight for a telephone-booth. Instead, she made haste to the express company where her husband worked. This was always her duty on the day before Christmas since one year, before Volstead times, when Mr. Riker had not appeared until midnight, and had slept through Christmas day. Her husband safely corralled, she led him to a drug-store and parked him just outside the telephone-booth.

VI

"WHAT do yer want?" John Williams said into the transmitter for the fiftieth time that day.

"This is Gift Granny," a voice came over the line. "I got your card an' noted contents. I ain't got the kind o' girl you want; but you know where she is. If you're a man an' not a mouse, you'll go an' get her yourself. Goo'-by!"

"How shall I send this here baby-carriage to Panamar?" a voice queried at his elbow.

"Send it by—by reindeer," John Williams answered, as he seized his overcoat and fled.

The man was within a block of the Riker apartment-house when he suddenly hesitated, and turned into a jewelry-shop. A few moments later he was running up the stairs. No one answered his impatient knock, and he flung open the door. Maybelle rose with a gasp.

"Why, Mr. Williams, you got a nerve comin' right in!" she began.

"None o' that!" he answered firmly, and took her in his arms.

"If you open the door quiet, you'll probably see somethin'," Mrs. Riker volunteered, puffing from her climb up the stairs.

Mr. Riker opened the door cautiously and peeped inside. Then he shut it noiselessly and put his arm around his wife.

"It's ketchin'," he announced waggishly.

As has been already stated, Mr. Riker had a reputation for wit in the express company's office.

The Dark Chapter*

A COMEDY OF CLASS DISTINCTIONS

By E. J. Rath

Author of "The Brains of the Family," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

THE Kilbournes, of Kilbourne Heights, are a prosperous and quite an interesting American family. Mrs. Kilbourne's hobby is the reclamation of tramps, and the other members of the family are disgusted but not surprised when she installs as chauffeur a man whom she has picked up on the road. He gives his name as Wade Rawlins, and tells his benefactress a weird story of his previous experiences.

There are three young Kilbournes—Hilda, aged twenty-five; Kane, twenty-two; and Marian, fifteen. Another member of the household is Grosvenor, the dignified butler. Marian Kilbourne, who is something of a tomboy, forms a sort of alliance with the new chauffeur. She teases him to teach her how to make a jack-knife dive, and in further token of friendship she borrows money from him. He is also taken into the confidence of Mr. Kilbourne, whom he drives surreptitiously to a midnight poker-game at a neighbor's house.

While waiting at the golf club with Hilda Kilbourne's blue roadster, Rawlins has an encounter with Herbert Wheeler, a member of the club, who runs his car into Hilda's and hotly resents Rawlins's suggestion that he shall make the damage good. On the next day he again takes Miss Kilbourne out, and learns that she expects to meet young Wheeler, with whom she is planning to elope. But Wheeler is so angry when he finds that she has brought the chauffeur with her, instead of driving herself, that a quarrel arises between him and Hilda.

XIV

RAWLINS parked carefully at the side of the road, turned off the switch, set the emergency brake, and made sure that the gear-set was in neutral. Then he turned in his seat and looked at Hilda.

"Is there something I can do for you, Miss Kilbourne?"

She met his glance without a trace of surprise, and he took that as a tribute, although he was not much concerned about compliments.

"I think so, Rawlins," she answered quietly.

He shifted his gaze to Wheeler.

"Here's where you get out," he said.

"I'll help."

Reaching down into the tonneau, he lifted one of the grips and dropped it into the ditch by the roadside. Then he dismounted and stood at attention.

Wheeler was inert for a moment. He was stunned, not so much by what Rawlins had done as by the complete acquiescence of Hilda Kilbourne. He stared at the man in the road, then at Hilda.

"Well?" he demanded.

But Hilda had nothing to say. She settled back against the cushions, breathed deeply, and experienced a sudden feeling of content. It was a feeling that dominated all sense of humiliation. The business was settled at last!

"I'll ask you to step out, sir."

It was the voice of Rawlins, pitched in a tone that would have sounded deferential to a stranger. Wheeler was slow in coming to grips with the situation. He was still studying the girl.

"As soon as possible," added Rawlins.

"What the devil—" Wheeler stumbled, then caught himself. "Hilda, what does this mean?"

Rawlins reached forward and tapped him on the arm.

"You are not to talk to Miss Kilbourne any more," he said. "If you have anything to say, talk to me; but first get out."

The man in the tonneau roused himself slowly, and rose to his feet.

"Does this mean—"

"I said you are not to talk to Miss Kilbourne. Come along, sir."

* Copyright, 1921, by E. J. Rath—This story began in the October number of *MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE*

"Hilda!"

But Hilda did not look at him. She stared straight ahead into the road, seemingly oblivious, but alive with wonder as to what Rawlins would do next.

He did not keep her waiting. Opening the door of the tonneau, he gripped Wheeler by an arm and heaved. The young gentleman inevitably landed in the road, and by good fortune on his feet. Rawlins closed the door and moved toward the driver's seat.

Then Wheeler went into action.

It was rather efficiently done on both sides, and because it was efficient it lasted but a short time. They were not badly matched. Whatever Mr. Wheeler may have lacked in skill and stamina was compensated by a fury of temper that drove him like a whirlwind. For a full minute he set the pace as he pleased. A novice might easily have picked him for the master, and Hilda had a brief interval of doubt as she watched; but there were certain refinements and matters of technique that she could not be expected to discern or understand. Nor was the cyclonic gentleman in flannels aware of them until, in a manner difficult to explain, his attack completely broke down.

Sitting in the road and blinking up at the tall figure of Rawlins, he had a vague sense of having overtaken his own barrage. It was more disconcerting than painful. As a matter of morale, it is not good to sprawl in a dusty road; but he was up briskly, for all that, with as much courage as a man can be expected to show. He resumed at the point where, by inadvertence, he had left off; but after this there was a certain sameness to it.

The last time he sat in the road he became stupidly aware that his nose was bleeding, and that only one eye was of any real service in discerning the fact. It was such an odd combination of circumstances that it not only puzzled but fascinated him.

He was not quitting; he was merely trying to understand something. He did not see Rawlins at all. In fact, he did not remember him. He did not remember the touring-car, or even Hilda Kilbourne. He just sat there, trying to look at his nose with one eye, and not at all certain whether it was his own nose.

Rawlins stepped into the car and started the motor. He moved the car a few yards down the road and began turning it. The

highway was rather narrow, and there was need of maneuvering.

When the feat was accomplished, Wheeler was still sitting in the road—in the very middle of it, in fact. He was quite oblivious, and consequently neither angry nor unhappy. He did not choose to make way for the car, even when Rawlins blew the horn; so it was necessary to make another stop, and, for the general safety of the introspective combatant, to roll him into the ditch, where his grip already lay. After that the road was clear.

For a little while Rawlins drove steadfastly back in the direction of Kilbourne Heights; but when a side road presented itself, he turned the car into it.

Hilda did not understand at first. She was too busy with memories to keep pace with the present; but when it dawned that Rawlins was merely consuming time, so that she might make any necessary mental readjustments, she smiled faintly and leaned forward.

"If you'll stop for a moment, I'll ride in the front seat," she said.

When the transfer was made, and the car moved again, she glanced at him. His face was without expression.

"Was he hurt—very much?" she asked.

"Not much, I think."

She sighed.

"But I can go back again," he said quickly.

Hilda laughed, then seemed suddenly ashamed of the levity.

"I want to thank you, Rawlins."

"It's unnecessary, Miss Kilbourne. I would prefer to thank you."

"For what?" she asked in wonder.

"The opportunity."

"Oh! I—I had forgotten."

Several minutes elapsed, in which it seemed that she could find nothing to say. She had wanted to ride in the front seat; she felt that it was necessary to explain a great deal; but she did not find that it came easily. Nevertheless, she had an idea that Rawlins understood.

"I made a very serious mistake," she ventured at last.

"It never got to be very serious, Miss Kilbourne."

"Oh, yes, Rawlins! It was very lucky that I didn't take the roadster, and leave you home, because then there would have been no argument. And when there is no argument he is really quite nice. And—"

"You wouldn't have married him," said Rawlins, as she paused.

"You think not?"

"I know."

"And why, please?"

"You'd have waked up."

"I'm not so certain."

"I am."

She looked at him—which he made it convenient to do, because he kept his own glance directly ahead. His impassivity puzzled her. If he had chosen to wear an air of triumph, she would have understood; but he seemed content to be merely the driver. She wanted to ask him why he was so certain, but felt a restraint that barred the inquiry.

"At any rate," she said, "I am greatly indebted to you. Please don't wave that aside, for I am."

He bowed slightly. Her glance wandered to his hands, resting loosely on the wheel, and then she was fumbling for a handkerchief.

"Your knuckles are bleeding," she said in explanation.

He looked at them in surprise.

"Stop for a minute, Rawlins!"

He stopped, but made a motion of protest when she began making a bandage of the handkerchief. Yet, because it seemed to satisfy her, he permitted the bandage to be applied.

"If you prefer, I'll drive," she said.

"It doesn't bother me, Miss Kilbourne. I hadn't noticed it."

Suddenly she laughed.

"If it had been your nose, Rawlins—"

He smiled at what might have been.

"There would have been difficulty about that," she said. "Noses are so hard to explain. And—" Rather abruptly, she became serious. "If you wish to speak your opinion of the whole affair, I'd be glad to have you, Rawlins."

He shook his head.

"I'd rather you would, Rawlins. I should like to know it."

"Why, I think he put up a very fair fight, Miss Kilbourne."

"I didn't mean that."

"With less temper he would have done very much better. He was trying to do too much at once."

"You don't understand me."

"He was in very fair condition, and he's game. But—"

"Rawlins!"

He turned and glanced at her.

"You know I don't mean that. I mean about myself. I—I would like to know what people think about other people in a case like this."

"I don't see the use of it," he said.

"But if I ask?"

"Oh, if you ask, why—but it's not at all a bad opinion, Miss Kilbourne. You'll be disappointed."

"I want it, anyhow," she said, laughing.

He grew thoughtful, and wrinkled his forehead. Then he shook his head.

"If you'll pardon me, Miss Kilbourne, I don't think we ought to talk about it at all. I think we ought to forget it. You're just a bit nervous. You may not know it, but you are. You're self-conscious about it. The best possible thing you could do is to go to the club and play eighteen holes. Shall I drive you there?"

It was the longest speech he had ever made to her, but it did not satisfy. She knew, however, that it was of no use to press the matter further.

"No, I won't play golf to-day, Rawlins. I think it will be all right to drive home now. The next road to the left will bring us back to the pike."

He nodded, and took the next road to the left. Hilda was vaguely annoyed, but there was not a word of complaint that she could utter. After that they kept silence until Kilbourne Heights was reached and the touring-car was back in the garage.

She was irresolute about something as she stepped out, but Rawlins understood.

"We say nothing about it, of course," he said.

She looked at him gratefully.

"I was quite sure you wouldn't, Rawlins. As for Mr. Wheeler—"

"No man talks about his own dark chapter, Miss Kilbourne."

Hilda smiled thoughtfully.

"His red chapter," she corrected.

"Red, then."

Still she seemed undecided, and this time he did not attempt to guess her thought.

"I offered to pay you," she said slowly; "but I have a feeling that you do not wish me to do so. Am I right?"

"Yes, you're right."

"Then—thank you!"

She held her hand toward him, and he took it for an instant.

"I won't ask you to carry those grips back to the house now, Rawlins. There is

no hurry about them. If you can keep them here—up-stairs, perhaps—until it is more convenient, I'll let you know when to bring them."

"Certainly, Miss Kilbourne."

She nodded and left him.

All the way to the house Hilda was preoccupied with a line of thought. It did not concern Herbert Wheeler at all, nor herself; nor did it relate to the misadventure of a romance, save in an indirect way. It dealt with the problem of Wade Rawlins, whose stature as a mystery was growing even more rapidly than before.

She tried to call to mind some other man she knew who would have done exactly as Rawlins did, and she failed. The affair by the roadside was the smallest part of it. The thing that counted most was his bearing during the period that followed it.

On the porch she encountered Marian and her mother, and she saw instantly that something was wrong; but the misgiving that instinctively assailed her passed in a second.

"Thank Heaven, you're here!" said Mrs. Kilbourne. "We've been looking for you everywhere."

"Is something wrong, mother?"

"Everything's wrong. Rene Fisher has telephoned out from the city that he won't be here—business or something."

"Oh!"

At another time Hilda would not have seen the catastrophe in so inconsequential a light. Just now it failed to impress. The fact that they would be a man short for dinner struck her without force.

"He ought to have known that we can't get people out here on an instant's notice," wailed Mrs. Kilbourne.

"I dare say he never thought about it," said Hilda, as she sank into a chair.

"But what are we going to do?"

Hilda sighed. Why was it always left for her?

XV

It was only a small dinner, but Mrs. Kilbourne did not like to have even her small parties thrown out of balance. Besides, she had advertised the city guest, as sometimes a hostess will do. She had let it be known, without entering upon specifications, that he was in some degree remarkable, and it was disturbing to discover that she would never be able to prove what she said.

"I wouldn't mind so much if it was a big party," she said; "but when you have only a few, and it leaves an odd girl—"

Marian made a gesture that was positively tragic.

"I was giving him to Minnie Harlan," said Mrs. Kilbourne wearily. "Now there won't be anybody for her, unless—well, unless—"

She looked speculatively at her younger daughter. Marian stamped her foot and bored a clenched fist into an open palm.

"It isn't fair! I won't stand for it!" she wailed. "Don't you let her do it, Hilda!"

Hilda's interest was still languid. She wondered what would have happened to the dinner-party if nothing had gone wrong with the Wheeler affair. Perhaps she ought to have seen it through; then there wouldn't have been the problem of an odd one at the table.

"Do what, Marian?" she asked.

"Keep me up-stairs!"

"Oh!"

"You say that as if it was nothing at all," said Marian hotly. "You've been fed at so many dinners that they don't mean anything to you; but I haven't. I never had a chance until now. And, mother, you promised!"

Mrs. Kilbourne looked troubled.

"Of course, I didn't foresee anything like this. I had no idea Rene would disappoint. It means that I'll have to move somebody up for Minnie Harlan, and that still leaves us short, and—"

"And I get the gate," said Marian. "Why can't you tell Minnie Harlan not to come?"

"Don't be silly, Marian," replied Hilda, waving the suggestion aside with a sweep of her hand.

"You're young, and there are lots of parties ahead of you, dear," said Mrs. Kilbourne mildly.

"I've heard that before. I'm always being trampled on. Why don't you send me down to eat with the servants? I'd have company, at any rate!"

"Marian, I wish you would not speak that way."

"Then give me a square deal. What did you let me get a new dress for, anyhow?"

Hilda and her mother exchanged glances. They realized that a new dress carried with it an implication. It demanded the exercise of good faith; but even a new dress did

not cure the evil of an odd number at dinner.

Suddenly Marian, who had taken to pacing a strip of porch, whirled about, threw her arms aloft, and snapped her fingers triumphantly.

"Got it!" she cried.

"What, dear?"

"Another man!"

Hilda's expression was not hopeful.

"Who?" she asked.

"Wade!"

"Wade?" repeated her mother in a puzzled voice.

"Of course. Wade—Wade Rawlins. Have you forgotten his name? The new one—the chauffeur—the tramp."

Mrs. Kilbourne gasped, and groped for a chair.

"Why, Marian!"

"Isn't it a perfectly great idea?" exclaimed Marian.

"It's—why—"

Mrs. Kilbourne came to a pause under the pressure of overwhelming astonishment.

"Why, it's just beautiful!" said Marian, perching herself on the porch rail. "Nobody around here knows Wade, except us. Probably they don't even know we've got a new tramp. If they do, they haven't seen him, at any rate. You know as well as I do that he'll behave wonderfully. He was a gentleman once, and I'll bet he knows as much about using the right forks as we do. There'll be somebody for Minnie Harlan, and I won't have to be sent up-stairs. It's a great idea!"

Mrs. Kilbourne was fanning herself slowly and trying to think. The thing was heretical, bewildering, and yet—no, it was too much to expect such a fulfilment. Some day, of course, the right man would come along. Perhaps he had come; but she did not feel that she was ready yet to recruit the dinner-table from the roadside. And if the neighbors ever knew!

"He won't eat with his knife," Marian was saying. "You know perfectly well he won't; and you don't have to explain anything about him at all."

"Impossible!" said her mother.

And then she looked at Hilda, counting on her to administer the *coup de grâce*; but Hilda did not seem to be ready. She was sitting in an attitude of profound thought, gently chewing her under lip.

"Why, mother, he'll be a polite riot!" cried Marian.

Mrs. Kilbourne thought it likely, although she would have phrased the idea differently; but she was not easily driven out of the groove in which her life ran. She was not a sensationalist.

"It's impossible," she repeated, with a shake of her head. "Why, your father would—"

"That's all *you* know about father," said Marian.

There was something more she could have said, but she did not forget that in certain matters it might pay to be cautious.

"No, it's not to be thought of. Is it, Hilda?"

Mrs. Kilbourne thus invited her elder daughter to put an end to argument. Hilda, still in a thoughtful mood, glanced up.

"I think it rather a good idea," she said, speaking in a deliberate tone, like one delivering an opinion from the bench.

"Why, Hilda!"

But Mrs. Kilbourne's exclamation was lost in a series of triumphant yelps from Marian, who wriggled off the railing and mauled her sister in a delighted embrace.

Hilda pushed her away. She was not actuated by any sense of doing favors for Marian.

"It saves your dinner arrangements," she said. "Our own servants are the only people who will know anything about it, and naturally they're not in a position to say anything. As for Rawlins—" She paused, as if giving particular consideration to just what she wanted to say. "He has undoubtedly had the upbringing of a gentleman, he talks more intelligently than a great many men I know, and I believe he has sufficient tact to handle the situation without embarrassing us or taking advantage of it. I think Marian has made a good suggestion."

Mrs. Kilbourne was fanning steadily, still trying to grasp the amazing verdict. She had not expected anything like this from Hilda, for it was Hilda upon whom she always relied for assistance in the suppression of Marian. Of course, she did not know all that was in Hilda's mind. She did not know that Hilda was visualizing a rather complicated form of revenge on Herbert Wheeler; or, in fact, that there was any occasion for revenge. She could only marvel at the fact that Hilda supported a shocking proposal with certain fair and forceful arguments. For it was unquestionably shocking to bring a tramp into the

social life of a community that proscribed tramps.

Marian had subsided, and was watching her mother. She knew when it was best to let an idea do its own work; but while she watched her mother, her thoughts were busy trying to fathom the extraordinary attitude of Hilda. She understood it no more than Mrs. Kilbourne, but she was inclined to search deeper for the motive.

Presently Mrs. Kilbourne laid down her fan. The amazing idea was insidious. The more she considered it, the more she discovered a tribute to herself. Perhaps, after all, it meant fruition of the great plan.

"Telephone for Rawlins," she said.

Marian dashed inside the house and had the thing done before her mother could change her mind. Then she did three cart-wheels in the main hall. She was headed again for the porch when she met her mother coming in. Mrs. Kilbourne halted her.

"I have decided to let Hilda talk to him," she said. "Come up-stairs."

"But I want to be there too!" wailed Marian.

Mrs. Kilbourne took her younger daughter by the arm and led her up-stairs.

"We don't want to embarrass Rawlins," she said. "Hilda will tell him whatever is necessary."

"But it was my idea, mother. I don't see why—anyhow, I'll be at the dinner, won't I?"

Sitting where they had left her on the porch, Hilda had a distant and reflective look in her eyes. She was not entirely clear about the efficacy of the revenge, or whether it was a revenge at all, so long as the victim never knew; and of course he would not know. But, leaving revenge wholly out of the account, she felt that there were other controlling considerations about which it was not essential to take the family into confidence.

If the family needed a substitute man for dinner, let that stand for the family. So far as she was concerned, there was a dark chapter between the pages of which she was eager to run her fingers. Anything might serve to open them—even a dinner.

When Rawlins came, she motioned him to a seat on the steps, but he preferred to stand. Hilda decided to be direct.

"My mother desires you to dine with us to-night at half past seven. Is it convenient for you?"

He stared for a second or two before answering.

"Just why, please?" he asked.

Hilda explained, with a brief clearness that gave him the situation in broad detail.

"I may as well tell you it was my sister's idea," she added.

He nodded at that. He could have guessed it.

"You say it is your mother's desire," he observed. "May I ask if it is yours, Miss Kilbourne?"

"It is my desire to help my mother, Rawlins."

"I understand. And have you considered this thing carefully, in all its angles?"

He seemed to be voicing a warning.

"You would not have been asked if it had not been considered. Please give me your answer."

"I accept, of course. Provided—"

He glanced at his uniform.

"That can be taken care of," said Hilda quietly. "It is still early. There is a very good town about twenty miles from here. You may take my car and get whatever you need. We would ask Kane to fit you out, but I am afraid you are too tall to wear anything of his."

He bowed acquiescence.

"If you will wait here, I will get you some money," she said, rising.

He leaned against a porch pillar and waited. He did not wear the expression that might be expected in a man about to be translated from the lowly places into the high ones. His face was a quiet mask for anything that he felt; but his mind was turning things over at a furious pace.

Hilda returned with money and gave it to him. He thanked her and put it into his pocket without examining it.

"You are supposed to be a friend from the city," she said. "It will not be necessary for you to explain anything. Those you meet will be strangers to you."

"Am I supposed to know the family—quite well?"

She gave the question a moment of thought.

"Yes, I think so, Rawlins; but you'll naturally avoid entering into any entangling reminiscences."

"Oh, certainly."

"I may say that my mother has been doing a little bragging about the man who has disappointed us," she added; "so perhaps a good deal will be expected of you."

"Do I take his name?"

"Oh, no! That might involve something unforeseen. Keep your own name. When I said a good deal might be expected of you, I was speaking chiefly on my mother's account."

"I think I understand," he said. "The family enjoys the acquaintance of more than one intelligent young man."

"Exactly. It will be a comfort to my mother if things go off well. After it is over, of course—"

She checked herself and glanced away.

"Suppose we wait until it is over," he suggested. "The rest of it can be discussed later."

"Yes. Thank you."

He took that as a dismissal, bowed, and left her.

As his long stride carried him rapidly from sight, Hilda was filled with a sudden misgiving. She had no fears about the dinner. She felt that the Kilbourne family would play its stupendous joke upon its guests and none would ever be the wiser; but what did Rawlins imply when he said the rest of it could be discussed later? Hilda had a very definite notion of what the sequel must inevitably be. It had not occurred to her that Rawlins might have some expectations of his own.

She walked around to the side porch, from which there was a glimpse of the garage through a vista in the shrubbery. She saw him enter. Presently she saw the blue roadster backing out. Then it disappeared along the winding drive.

"I do hope," she muttered, "that they can manage to fit him on short notice. He has such frightfully long legs!"

XVI

ETTA, the serving maid who helped Grosvenor at the small dinners, came into the pantry from the dining-room, bearing an empty tray. The pantry was really a large room. Rosa was sitting at a table in a farther corner, polishing some glasses. Grosvenor was standing stiffly, his back against the wall, and his arms folded across his breast.

"What is he doing now?" he asked in cold tones, as Etta deposited the tray.

"They've got him telling about something that happened in Paris," said Etta.

Rosa stopped polishing, in order to listen better.

"Something that happened in the Roo

de—I don't remember what he called it, but it's one of the *roos*, anyhow," added Etta.

Grosvenor scowled heavily.

"I shall give Mrs. Kilbourne my notice in the morning," he said.

"Well, I won't!"—from Rosa.

"Nor me," declared Etta. "Who knows but it'll be our turn next?"

The butler glanced from one woman to the other with an air of contemptuous pity.

"If you wish to wait on tramps at dinner," he said, addressing himself to Etta, "then keep your job!"

"You've eaten with 'em," retorted Etta.

"What's the difference?"

"And how do you know he's a tramp?" demanded Rosa. "Maybe he *has* been in Paris."

Grosvenor smoothed his vest and adjusted his gloves. They would be needing him in the dining-room again, and he steeled himself to the hateful task. Rosa caught the look on his face.

"Let me take something in," she said eagerly. "Honest, I'm crazy to see him."

"You will be good enough to remember your place," remarked the butler sternly. "It is bad enough to have Etta exposed."

With that he strode through the short corridor that connected the pantry with the dining-room. A pleasant medley of laughter assailed his ears as he entered, although to Grosvenor it sounded bacchanalian and sinister. Evidently the Paris story had just been finished.

There were sixteen at the oval table, and the shocking person was seated on the farther side, between Minnie Harlan and Hilda. Just as Marian predicted, he was using a fork, instead of a knife. From a place half-way across the room Grosvenor could see that it was the correct fork. Probably he had watched when the others began.

Marian was seated almost directly opposite Rawlins. There was a youth at her elbow who remembered what he was there for, but Marian had no eyes for him. She was too amazed at the success of her project to miss anything that concerned the man across the table. Once she surreptitiously pinched her leg to make sure that there was no dream running through her brain.

"But, Mr. Rawlins," said the Harlan girl, "how in the world did you ever manage to explain it to the prefect?"

Rawlins smiled easily and glanced at Mr. Kilbourne, who sat at one end of the table. Mr. Kilbourne fetched a slow and cautious wink.

"And who's the prefect?" demanded Marian, who caught the wink.

"He's a sort of boss cop," said Rawlins. "Hilda can tell you. She probably had to go there for her card of identity."

Hilda nodded, but there was a faint tightening of her lips that was not entirely hidden by a smile.

The matter of names had not been discussed when Rawlins reported for dinner. There had been no time for it. He returned late from his errand in the blue roadster, and there was barely time for him to shave, dress, and hurry to the house in advance of the guests from the neighborhood. Being an advertised attraction from the city, Rawlins, of course, ranked as a house guest, although he had not yet claimed all the privileges of that position.

Hilda knew he would be a success the instant she saw him. In the matter of apparel he had done astonishingly well. If a tailor had taken a week at the task, she did not believe the result could have been improved. Marian thought he was beautiful. To Mr. Kilbourne and his wife he looked like any other young man in a claw-hammer coat.

But the guests began arriving, and the opportunity for a council of strategy was gone. Only Marian had time to say to him:

"After dinner, if you don't ask me to dance, you'll be sorry for it."

So "Mr. Rawlins" was presented to the Harlan girl, and the McCumber girl, and the Shinn's, and the others who straggled in; and when he took Minnie Harlan into the dining-room he was already a marked man.

It was at the very start that the problem of names arose, and Rawlins met it in the only possible way. Marian fixed him with her glance across the table.

"Wade," she said, "I was trying to get you for tennis this afternoon, but you disappeared. What happened?"

Marian liked to skate where the ice was thin. She was in the habit of doing it without rehearsal. The Kilbournes held their breath. They knew very well where Rawlins had been, and they prayed nobody else did.

"I was exploring," he answered. "Hilda loaned me her car."

Thus he established precedent and status at one stroke. Hilda eyed her plate and flushed, but nobody noticed it. After all, she reflected, it was the only thing to do. He was a family friend from the city, and the inference to be drawn from his presence as a house guest was that the friendship implied a reasonable degree of intimacy.

After that, all of the Kilbournes, even Hilda, called him "Wade," for there was no alternative. It was a matter on which Grosvenor made an early report in the pantry, but he could not induce either Rosa or Etta to share his opinion of the vulgarity.

The neighborhood guests of the Kilbournes had their eyes on the stranger. Most of them understood that he was substituting for a gentleman whose dinner-table attractions were rated remarkably high by the hostess, and they were willing to make allowances. They were even slightly sympathetic, for it was not fair to expect that the Kilbournes had more than one marvel on their list; but there was no need for sympathy, and presently Mrs. Kilbourne found herself enjoying a quiet triumph.

The stranger proved to be charming. Even Marian and Hilda, who had their separate view-points concerning him, and who had seen him in more intimate moments, perhaps, than any other members of the family, discovered fresh cause for private wonder. As for Minnie Harlan, to whom he officially "belonged" for the evening, she was quite overcome.

Of course, Rawlins did not handle himself like an exhibit. Marian made one or two efforts to lead him about the ring and display his points, but she got a look from him that put a check on her kindly enthusiasm. He was simply a gentleman dining at ease among his equals. If he happened to be an interesting gentleman, that was incidental.

He was cautious as well as correct. He did not forget that he had taken Miss Harlan in. It seemed to Hilda that he was unnecessarily scrupulous in remembering it. There was another man on Miss Harlan's left who also had a tongue in his head and might easily have been permitted to encroach; but Rawlins was conscientious. If there were moments when Hilda felt that the city guest might pay a little more attention to the family, he did not seem to be aware of them.

"He has them all going," reported Etta,

after one of her returns to the pantry.
"He's just wonderful!"

"Anybody could tell he was a gentleman," sighed Rosa. "I wish Grosvenor would let me take in a tray!"

"Not him!" said Etta. "He don't want me in there when he can help it; but there's sixteen, so he has to. Rosa, he eats just like all the rest of 'em. And *talk!*"

Rosa rolled her eyes in envy.

"But just wait till we get hold of him to-morrow!" she said.

"I've got an idea that you won't ever see *him* again, not in our part of the house." And Etta sighed on her own account.

Grosvenor came into the pantry, so stiff-legged that he seemed to need breaking at the knees.

"He acts like he was my superior," he said, apparently talking to himself. "The—hobo! I shall certainly give my notice to Mrs. Kilbourne. And it's a scandal, the way he calls her 'Hilda'!"

A sound of laughter came from the dining-room. Grosvenor winced, and wiped his forehead on a napkin. Etta made a grimace at Rosa, and winked.

The dinner went very well indeed. Mrs. Kilbourne knew for a certainty that it was an undiluted success when she heard Mrs. Shinn whisper to her neighbor:

"Who is he? Of course he has money; but who is he?"

On that point Rawlins was fair to the Kilbournes. He told their neighbors no more than he had already told the family. He put them in the way of drawing any number of attractive conclusions; but he was indefinite, with a sort of modest mystery that had the same tantalizing effect upon others that it always produced in the case of Hilda.

After dinner they danced on the porch, where they found it cooler than inside. Minnie Harlan had the first dance with Rawlins. Hilda concluded to go up-stairs and change her slippers. When she came back, Marian was dancing with him, and it was so obvious that the girl was in heaven that her sister involuntarily frowned.

But he had not forgotten Hilda, just as he forgot nothing that a gentleman ought to do. The third dance was hers. She began it more graciously than her feelings really warranted, probably because the Harlan girl was watching.

As they neared the end of the porch he spoke to her.

"Who's the young man who sat next to Marian?" he asked.

"That's the Merrill boy. Why?"

"I saw him at the club."

She gave him a startled look.

"Did he recognize you?" she gasped.

"I don't think so. He was just joining the group when you broke up the argument between myself and Mr. Wheeler."

"But if he *should* recognize you! Oh!"

"I imagine the social structure would crash," he remarked.

He could feel her body stiffen against his arm.

"We are not snobs," she said coldly, "but—"

"But—" he echoed, with a smile.

She missed a step, but he caught her into the swing again skilfully. Somewhere Rawlins had learned really to dance, and she knew it.

"My fault, Hilda," he said, with casual politeness.

She looked up at him swiftly.

"We are not at the table, Rawlins."

"But the part has to be played."

"Then play it for the others, if you please."

He did not think it was needful for her to speak so sharply.

"Then I'm to step out of character for you—is that it? Stepping back and forth may trip me."

"I think you'll manage to keep your feet," she said. "And I think I'll not dance any more just now."

He released her as they neared a porch settee. When she was seated, he slipped into the place beside her.

"If I've been a failure, tell me," he said.

Her look told him that she required something more explicit.

"I mean with reference to to-night. Have I fallen down? Have I disgraced the family? Have I made an atrocious slip of some sort? Do any of your friends know what I am?"

Hilda might have answered that even the Kilbourne family did not know what he was, but she was not reopening that subject to-night.

"I've no criticism to make," she answered. "I think you have done very well, Rawlins."

"Then be fair to me, just for to-night, at any rate."

"I am not unfair to you; I am merely remembering."

"Forget," he urged.

She steered the conversation into another channel.

"You will be expected to dance with Miss McCumber, Rawlins."

"Certainly. I won't forget."

"And possibly Mrs. Shinn."

"Very well."

"I don't think there are any others," she said reflectively.

"And after that, shall I repeat?"

"We probably shall not dance late. We rarely do."

She was glancing at Minnie Harlan as she spoke, and Rawlins caught the glance.

"Well, if you think of anything else, tell me," he said, rising. "I am here under your orders, you know. I want to do whatever is necessary. I think Miss McCumber is at liberty now."

Hilda watched him as he went away to meet a new duty. She remained on the settee until he passed with Miss McCumber, who was a poor dancer, but whose face showed her to be grimly determined to be worthy. Then Hilda went in search of her mother, in order to get the benefit of her opinion on what to do after the party.

Just as Hilda said, they did not dance late. Marian and Minnie Harlan had second dances with the wonder man, but Hilda excused herself. Then the party began to disintegrate politely, through the exercise of that peculiar sixth sense which tells guests when their services are no longer required.

Rawlins stood with the family group, saying good night, and he gave the ceremony a touch of grace and dignity at which Hilda secretly marveled. Being near him, it was inevitable that she should hear a fragment of conversation between him and the Harlan girl.

"It's a long time since I've played," he said.

"But none of us really play well. I shall expect you."

"That's very kind of you, Miss Harlan."

"I'll look for you, then."

"Without fail."

"At eleven," she said. "And bring Hilda, of course."

He bowed over Miss Harlan's hand and promised that he would do his best. He would have taken her down the steps to the car, but he had a glimpse of the chauffeur who drove it, and recognized one of the group of witnesses at the club.

When the last guest had gone, Hilda was searching for him. She found him standing at the sideboard with her father, and waited until that was over. Finally she caught him as he was crossing the porch, evidently on his way to the garage.

"Rawlins!"

Her voice had an edge, but there was also a flicker of apprehension in it.

"Forgive me," he said. "I was forgetting to say good night."

"I overheard something. I could not help it. I—"

"Yes?"

"What were you and Miss Harlan discussing, just before she went?"

"Tennis," he answered simply.

She shot a look of unwilling belief at him.

"You mean—tell me exactly what you mean," she commanded.

"Why, I'm playing tennis over at the Harlans' at eleven to-morrow," he said.

"I am to bring you. Didn't she speak to you about it?"

There was horror in her eyes.

XVII

For a few seconds she stood staring, as if Rawlins was some fascinating evil.

"Never!" she cried sharply. "Never!"

"Suppose we discuss it in the morning," he said. "You're probably tired."

"We will discuss it here and now—and settle it!"

Her voice had risen, and Rawlins glanced toward the door that led into the hall. She caught his meaning, but it did not swerve her.

"Come down to the end of the porch," she said quietly. "This is not going to be postponed."

He followed her. Bracing her shoulders against a pillar, she folded her arms and viewed him with a swift study. There was no doubt that she was both angry and frightened; but she had a grip on herself.

"As I understand it," she said, "you have presumed to make a social engagement with one of our guests, and have included me. Is that right?"

"Entirely correct."

Hilda measured him with another glance.

"Then you have done a most dishonorable thing. More than that, it is preposterous and impossible. I am ashamed—and disappointed."

"Without conceding that it was dishon-

orable," he said slowly, "will you tell me what alternative I had?"

"Can't you see what an utterly false and wrong thing it is? Haven't you any—moral sense?"

"It hadn't struck me as a matter of morals. I regarded it simply as a matter of social convention."

Hilda breathed deeply.

"You are attempting to take dishonorable advantage of an accident," she began. "It was only an accident that you were at our table to-night. You came to us a tramp. My mother was kind to you. She gave you employment as a chauffeur. You have been one of our servants. You are known to them exactly as you are known to us. You were asked to do something in an emergency, because it seemed that you would be able to do it. And now—now that you've done it—you are presuming to establish yourself as one of our family friends. You! A—"

"Tramp," he said, bowing, as she came to a choking pause. "But I think you are forgetting that it was not I who established myself as a family friend. Rather, wasn't it the family? Certainly I never suggested it."

She moved her head impatiently.

"This is not a thing to quibble about, Rawlins."

"I've no desire to quibble. I was here to help entertain your friends, at your invitation, was I not? I did what I could. Your friends were given to understand that I was a house guest—but not by me, remember. I was under an obligation to play the part, to be courteous to the neighbors of my—friends. Could I decline such a simple invitation as playing tennis on a neighbor's courts? Would I have been playing the part if I had?"

Hilda listened, but she plumbed his words as mere sophistry.

"What would you have had me do when Miss Harlan asked me?" he added.

"You should have remembered who you were," she answered quickly. "That was obvious."

"And who was I?"

She hesitated for an instant. Well, who was he? It was a question calculated to send her mind drifting into speculation again; but Hilda knew that it was a time to keep sternly to facts in hand.

"You should have declined, of course," she said. "You know it as well as I."

"What good reason could I have given?"

"Anybody who wants to give a reason can find one; but we are not going to argue about reasons. They're unnecessary now. You will not dream of trying to carry this thing through."

"I have already accepted," he said with a shrug.

"Are you resolved to humiliate people who have been kind to you?"

"Not at all. I have every desire to help them."

Even in the dimness of the light where they stood, he could see her eyes smoldering with anger.

"Why do you wish to make this situation more difficult for us?" she said, keeping control of her voice. "Is it money you're after? Are you blackmailing the family, Rawlins?"

"I'm quite sure you know better than that," he answered.

"Haven't we been sufficiently humiliated now, before our servants? Don't you see that it's likely we shall have to dismiss them all, to prevent talk? And just because we yielded to a silly impulse! Oh, have some decency about it!"

He regarded her gravely, but without any sign of resentment.

"Why wasn't it explained to me in advance that this was for one night only?" he asked.

"We had no time to explain anything. You know it as well as I."

"Then what is it you expect me to do?"

"What is the obvious thing?" she countered. "You are a man of intelligence. Ask yourself."

"Do I become your chauffeur again?"

Hilda shook her head, dismissing it as unworthy of answer.

"Then please tell me what you want," he repeated.

The careful deference of his manner neither soothed nor reassured her, for Hilda sensed the iron that was hidden beneath it.

"I want you to disappear, of course."

"Both as guest and chauffeur?"

"Certainly. There is no alternative, is there?"

"And is that the family wish, too?"

She did not know, but she seriously doubted it. Marian, of course, did not count; her enthusiasms were nearly always misdirected. Kane also counted for practically nothing. She felt that she could influence her mother, but she was no longer

certain about her father. That moment of fellowship at the sideboard filled her with misgivings, because it was no part of the play-acting for the benefit of neighbors. It stood apart, on its own merits, whatever they might be; and Hilda did not yet know whether it possessed any sort of prophetic significance.

"It is my wish, and I am speaking for the family," she said.

"Then I'm to disappear," he mused, watching her.

"It is the only possible thing, as you can readily understand."

It was no time for Hilda to analyze the conflict that lay within her. She knew that she was right—disappearance was the one solution, and of course it must be a permanent disappearance; but she was also aware that she did not want Rawlins to disappear.

She had promised herself to discover something, and her determination had only been sharpened by things that had happened this night; but thus far her journey of discovery had taken her nowhere. If he disappeared, there would be an end of the quest. So, while duty and a sense of the family's social safety made it clear that Rawlins must go away—and stay away—desire kept annoying her with a persistent and contrary urging.

"And how am I to manage a disappearance?" he asked, wrinkling his forehead over the problem.

"It is quite simple," said Hilda. "So far as our own family is concerned, I undertake to explain everything. In the case of Miss Harlan, all you have to do is to write a note. You will know how, as well as I. Say to her that you have been called away suddenly. A long-distance telephone message will do. You are compelled to return to the city on business. You regret very much, of course, and so forth."

He nodded in appreciation of her grasp of social methods and conventions.

"But how about the Shinns?" he asked.

"The Shinns?" she echoed.

"I have been asked to tea there in the afternoon."

She could not truly admit that it astonished her, although this was news.

"Another note will take care of that," she said shortly.

"And there are some engagements for the day after to-morrow," continued Rawlins thoughtfully. "Tentative, of course;

I told them I was in your hands. There's a foursome, and—"

She shut him off with a quick gesture.

"Write as many notes as may be necessary," she said. "Only see that you do it. You've simply got to get us out of this!"

"I'm sorry I was such a success," he murmured.

"I'm sorry you took such an unworthy advantage of it," she countered.

He appeared to be studying the situation. It was so long before he spoke that Hilda felt the tension.

"This isn't fair to me," he said, at last. "I care nothing about establishing myself as a social proposition; but I had a job that I enjoyed. Now I am told that I must give up my job, just because I was drafted out of it for a single evening in order to bridge the family over an emergency. Do you call that a square deal?"

"I'm not calling it anything, except to tell you that it must be done, Rawlins."

"Why wasn't I told that this involved the sacrifice of my job?"

"We—we hadn't time to look ahead," said Hilda, moving uneasily.

"Then I think you ought to meet the consequences in a fair and square way."

Rawlins regarded her with such a fixed gaze that she dropped her glance.

"I am meeting them," she replied resentfully. "I'm doing the only possible thing."

"Oh, no!" He shook his head. "There's the other alternative—the one I've already embarked on."

"I won't hear of it or think of it!"

"But I don't see how you can avoid it. I'm willing to agree that it would be difficult for me to continue as your chauffeur. That's the trouble about being lifted up to the high places. You can't very well climb down; but so long as I stay up, why not?"

"And how long do you think you could stay up?" she demanded contemptuously.

"Oh, for a week, at least; whatever length of time it's customary for a house guest to stay."

The sensation of dismay was creeping over her again, and she found no tranquilizing effect in that inexplicable urging of another self—the urging that he should stay. There was a principle involved, and resolutely she kept it as the star to guide her.

"Let me appeal to you as a gentleman, Rawlins," she said suddenly.

"Your appeal might be misplaced."

"No, I'm sure of it!"

He made a slight bow of acknowledgment—a gesture that she was coming to regard with suspicion, for she was not sure that it was wholly devoid of mockery.

"I—I know it's a good deal to ask," she went on hurriedly. "I'm sorry that you must lose your place, if you really cared to keep it. We'll make it very much worth your while—truly. You've done me one great service, Rawlins, and I'm not forgetting it. I'm not ungrateful. Now I am asking you to do me another."

It was the first time he had seen her in an appealing mood; until now he had known her only as a lady imperative. The change had an attraction for him, but he knew that it was dangerous. It was safer to have her back on the other ground.

"I'll take a day or two to think it over," he said.

He did not miscalculate the effect. She stiffened against the pillar again, and the combativeness was back in her eyes.

"No!" she cried. "You'll decide now!"

"Very well, if you insist."

"And your decision—"

She realized the weakness of the phrasing. Somehow, somewhere, she had allowed the decision to slip out of her hands.

"I'm sorry to oppose you," he said.

Despite the turmoil of the struggle within, Hilda was calm enough to understand why Rawlins had the faculty of getting his own way. He had a baffling inflexibility that ignored rather than triumphed over opposition.

"But you *can't* do this thing, Rawlins! Don't you see that you *can't*?"

"I'll be scrupulously careful," he said.

"You don't understand. Why, our servants alone—"

"Let me take care of the servants."

She stared at him helplessly.

"I think it can be handled without any serious trouble," Rawlins added. "I am almost certain that I can guarantee you no embarrassment."

"I—" She paused, realizing the uselessness of it. "Then I demand to know your motive."

"It's getting a bit late," he said; "and to-morrow may be a rather full day."

He turned to leave her. Once more Hilda was seized with a panic-stricken devotion to duty.

"Rawlins, you *mustn't*. I'm almost willing to beg."

But he shook his head, to indicate that she might just as well spare herself any such humiliation.

"I'll stay at the garage to-night," he said. "To-morrow will be time enough to move up my things."

"What?" she cried, wide-eyed.

"Any one of the guest-rooms will serve. I'm easy to suit. Good night, Hilda!"

She was limp against the pillar as he strode down the porch, descended to the lawn, and became invisible in the night.

He would go through with it, of course; she was aware now that she knew it from the beginning. It was all in his hands, the whole situation, to do with it as he would. He would stay; he would move into the house; he would pick up the imposture where the family left off and carry it Heaven knew where. They were helpless!

In the end it would all be exposed. It meant ruin—and the family would be blundering accessories. The shadow that brooded over Kilbourne Heights enveloped her, until it seemed to her that she choked in its soft yet pitiless texture.

And—amazing of all things—she was glad that Rawlins was going to stay.

XVIII

MRS. KILBOURNE merely nibbled at her breakfast. She was in a cautious mood, for she did not know whether she ought to be appalled or triumphant. Repeatedly she glanced across the table at Henry Kilbourne, as if in search of guidance for the proper reaction. She did not derive much enlightenment from her watching, although it gave her a sense of security to see that he ate bacon and eggs with his usual avidity. He had a sane and solid morning appetite, and it always seemed to Mrs. Kilbourne that it stood as a bulwark between the family and the world.

"I suppose we have ourselves to blame," she said tentatively.

"About what?" he asked, without looking up.

"Why—Rawlins."

"Oh! Well, don't blame me. I didn't start it."

"But don't you care?"

"Nope! None of my business."

That relieved her, but she could not let it rest. She felt that her conscience cried for succor.

"But it has such unseen possibilities, Henry."

"So does a jack-pot."

"I'm not sure I did the right thing—"

"Well, you opened it," said Mr. Kilbourne, as she hesitated. "Are you going to let him raise you out?"

"Hilda is very much disturbed about it."

He eyed his wife briefly, then grinned into his coffee-cup.

"She can fold up her hand any time she wants," he said.

Mrs. Kilbourne frowned and sighed. Often she wished that Henry would forget the follies of his youth.

"I'm not certain what we ought to do," she mused. "It may be for the best, of course. What do you think, Henry?"

"Want my opinion, eh?"

"Of course I want it."

"Great anxiety, eh? Didn't ask it before you had him on your hands, did you?"

"Well, you see, it happened—"

"Yes; it happened," said Mr. Kilbourne. "All right; let it ride that way. Here's my opinion—I think it's a damned good joke on the family."

"Henry!"

But Henry had excused himself, there being no more bacon and eggs to conquer. He was passing through the hall when he encountered a tall man in flannels.

"Morning, Rawlins," he said. "Had breakfast yet?"

"Not yet. Am I late?" asked Rawlins.

"Lots of time. You'll find Mrs. Kilbourne at the table. Walk right in and help yourself! Tell Grosvenor to get you whatever you like."

Then, with a solemn glance that might mean anything, Mr. Kilbourne went out on the porch to smoke.

Rawlins went into the breakfast-room. Mrs. Kilbourne began fluttering the instant she saw him. Grosvenor, who entered the room at the same instant, dropped a glass, which splintered and tinkled its way into fragments.

Bowing with a courtliness that might have conveyed a hint of satire to a more observant person than Mrs. Kilbourne, Rawlins seated himself at a vacant place and immediately began a conversation about a pair of blue jays that ran things with a high hand on the lawn behind the house. It seemed that he knew things about birds, and Mrs. Kilbourne tried to interpret it as a hopeful sign, even though he probably picked it all up from sleeping in the open, between each day's walk.

When Hilda came in, Mrs. Kilbourne excused herself. If Hilda was surprised, she did not betray herself. If she had any intention of refusing breakfast, it was instantly checked by the presence of Grosvenor, who stood near the sideboard, his face frozen into a glance that was meant to express a sort of snobbish holiness.

"Good morning," said Rawlins, rising until she had taken her place.

"Good morning."

That cast the die, and Rawlins knew it. He did not know yet whither it all led, but another crisis had been passed. When Grosvenor disappeared into the pantry, Hilda glanced up.

"Does my father know about this?" she asked.

"I met him in the hall."

Hilda nodded. For the moment there was nothing either to be done or feared in that direction. She glanced curiously at Rawlins's clothes.

"I must explain," he said. "It was inevitable that it should work out this way. You were rather generous when you gave me some money yesterday. Perhaps you never bothered to count it. It put me in a position to get what I needed. It didn't pay for everything, of course; but it went a considerable distance. I was able to open an account for the rest."

She could only stare. Not that she disbelieved him for an instant, for it was obviously too horribly true; but she marveled, nevertheless.

"Even a farce has to be costumed," she said.

"Or a society play," he suggested.

Privately, she was not displeased that he was dressing the part well. Otherwise it would have been even more intolerable.

"About my room," he remarked. "Do I speak to your mother?"

She had forgotten that part of it, so that his question struck her as a new bit of effrontery. But since last night she had schooled herself against the making of protests that were futile.

"It will not be necessary to disturb my mother," she said. "The butler can arrange for it."

Just then the butler came back from the pantry.

"Oh, Grosvenor," said Rawlins quietly.

There was a moment of amazed hesitation; then Grosvenor approached.

"I'm moving into one of the guest-

rooms," remarked Rawlins, glancing up at him. "If there's one that has the morning sun, I prefer it. Kindly see that my things are brought up from the garage as soon as convenient."

Grosvenor was unconsciously holding his breath, as if it were a sort of refuge between himself and utter disaster; and now, as it escaped him, it wheezed dismally in his throat.

"I have no instructions—" he began.

"What's that?" Rawlins looked up again sharply. "If I mistake not, you just received instructions."

Grosvenor's glance wandered uneasily to Hilda. The social structure of Kilbourne Heights tottered beneath his feet. Perhaps he could not have been expected to know that an appeal to Hilda would be futile, for he did not yet realize the lengths to which vandalism had been carried; but he was about to discover the uselessness of protest.

"Please do as Mr. Rawlins asks," said Hilda. "I think the room in the east wing will suit him."

Grosvenor turned pale as he bowed and backed away from the table. He went heavily from the room, with the droop of a vanquished general, or a ruined financier, or somebody who has tasted the bitter cup.

"Wasn't it sufficient to humiliate the family?" inquired Hilda. "Do you also assume to govern the servants?"

"What I did was necessary," said Rawlins, as he reached for another piece of toast. "You may not have perceived it, but the situation was, in a sense, critical. Being recognized as a house guest by the family, it followed that I must be so recognized by the servants. That is due even more to the family than it is to me. Grosvenor hesitated, and hesitation makes a bad domestic. By dealing with him promptly, we dispose of the entire servant question. Grosvenor will take care of the rest. I thank you for promptly sustaining me."

"I had no alternative," she answered coldly.

"Quite true—which shows that you appreciated the situation as readily as I did myself."

She was silent a while after that. Rawlins finished his breakfast and waited. She would have told him that this was unnecessary, but for the conviction that he would stay despite her. It was all very unpleasant, having him sit there on the other side of the table, yet it did not spoil Hilda's ap-

petite. Even without an appetite, she would have eaten deliberately, if only to show him how little all these things really mattered.

When she rose, he accompanied her as far as the hall.

"The Harlan place adjoins Kilbourne Heights, I believe," he remarked.

"Yes."

"It is at eleven, you know, that we are playing tennis."

"I am not playing."

He looked honestly troubled.

"But I'm to bring you," he said. "It was distinctly understood."

Here was a case where at least she could have her own way, and she proposed to take it.

"I shall not go," she said, taking care to speak precisely and slowly. "If you find it necessary to make excuses for me, you may say anything within reason."

"I'm sorry, Hilda."

"And let me beg this of you," she added.

"So long as this—this situation lasts, please omit me from any engagements that I do not make myself. I wish to be left out of everything, so far as possible. I feel certain that you'll remember my wishes. Just—just try to be the man you were yesterday, when you did me a great service and asked nothing for it."

She left him standing in the hall and went up-stairs to her room. Rawlins pondered her speech gravely. The closing part of it gave him a feeling of discomfort. He did not, for the moment, feel in a particularly masterful mood; but presently he shrugged his wide shoulders, as if trying to assure himself that it was all in the hands of destiny.

"It will have to go through now," he muttered. "But—through to what?"

On the porch he found Marian. She seized his arm and led him away for a walk.

"You're going great!" she exclaimed, when they were beyond ear-shot of the house. "Sorry I had breakfast ahead of you, but I'm always hungry. Where did you get all these clothes and things?"

He seemed diffident about discussing his clothes, and she passed the matter for the present, although there were certain financial phases that excited her curiosity. She did not want him entirely to lose sight of the Marian equation.

"Did they tell you who started all this?" she asked.

"Yes, but I'm not yet sure whether I ought to thank you."

"Don't you like being elevated? I think it's wonderfully exciting to become rich all of a sudden. I know all about it!"

"I wasn't aware of having come into any fortune."

"But it's the same thing," she insisted. "You're a house guest, and you have a whole outfit of clothes, and the run of the place, and anything you need. What more could you want? What else is there? I'll bet right now you have more money than I have!"

He made haste to seek another topic, for Marian was showing familiar symptoms. So he told her about Grosvenor, which impressed her as such a worthy consummation that she stopped and solemnly shook hands with him. For a while conversation confined itself to the jack-knife dive, and they made a compact for a complete demonstration in the afternoon. Then they talked about everybody at the party; and after that Marian switched abruptly to something else.

Rawlins had come to understand these quick shifts. A topic suddenly introduced, with all the effect of being tossed into the conversation haphazard, was always the major topic in Marian's mind. She had a fancy for keeping the important thing in reserve and then nonchalantly springing it. It was a style of campaigning that suited her moods.

"How are you hitting it off with Hilda?" she asked.

"We're doing nicely."

"No artificial refrigeration?"

Rawlins laughed, and let that serve for an answer.

"She'll get over it," said Marian. "She can't keep the ice-plant running forever. You know what's the matter with her, don't you?"

"I hadn't noticed anything."

"Don't lie, Wade! Do you really mean to say that you didn't notice anything last night?"

"I doubt if I know just what you mean," he countered.

"Oh, well, then I'll explain," said Marian generously. "Hilda's jealous."

"Jealous of what?"

"They're never jealous of 'what'; they're jealous of 'whom,'" she answered, and there was a tone of great wisdom in her voice. "Now, who's the whom?"

"I give it up. I didn't notice she was jealous of anybody."

"Then perhaps you didn't notice Minnie Harlan."

"Oh!"

"I thought so. Hilda's jealous of Minnie. And, of course"—Marian paused long enough to give it the right effect—"you're in on this eternal triangle stuff."

Rawlins ventured a look at the juvenile sage who walked by his side, then essayed to express his disbelief.

"I hardly think a tramp is cutting any figure in the situation," he said modestly.

"Is a tramp a man?" inquired Marian.

"Usually."

"Then what's the matter with his cutting a figure?" she demanded.

"I'll hear you further on that point."

"What's the use? You probably know it as well as I do. Hilda is hopping mad at Minnie because Minnie asked you over to play tennis."

"She told you about that, did she?"

"Last night," said Marian. "I corkscrewed her after she came up-stairs."

"Well," mused Rawlins, "I think, if she is angry, it's not because I was invited, but because of your sister's fear that there may be some embarrassing social consequences."

"All bunk, Wade—bunk! She's mad because Minnie asked you, and all the rest of it can go hang."

Marian spoke with an assurance that overbore all doubting opposition. Besides, she had the advantage of the woman's point of view.

"In that case, I'm sorry," he said.

"That's more bunk. What's the use of being sorry? I think it's splendid. Hilda's not going over to the Harlans with you, is she?"

"No. She declined this morning."

"Um-m! I knew it last night. If she went, she'd only bite the handle off Minnie's racket, so it's just as well. You're going to take me, I suppose?"

He gave her a quick, suspicious look.

"Why, of course I will. I insist on your coming."

"Thanks! I was coming anyhow. I—"

She checked herself, came to a halt, and wrinkled her forehead as a symptom of reflection.

"See here, Wade. If I let you in on something, it's right under your belt—is that understood?"

"It always is."

"Well, then—I'm going over because Hilda isn't. Have you got it yet?"

When he seemed puzzled, she stood on tiptoe and whispered, although there was nobody within a hundred yards of them.

"Hilda asked me to!"

XIX

WADE and Marian came back from tennis to discover that the family had not waited luncheon. They had the table to themselves. From a seat on the south porch, where she was making a show of reading, Hilda could hear their laughter. She found it annoying, not only because there was so much of it, but also because she did not know what it was about. The conversation lacked carrying power, but the mirth traveled far, like an echo.

When they left the dining-room, it required some maneuvering to get Marian away from him. She was all for proceeding immediately to the jack-knife demonstration; but Hilda reminded her that she would have to wait for at least an hour after eating a meal, and finally got her upstairs and into her room, where she shut the door.

"Well, were we disgraced?" she demanded of her sister.

Hilda had not the least apprehension on that score, but she wanted Marian to understand that she was concerned for the family fortunes, rather than actuated by mere personal curiosity.

"Disgraced? By Wade? I should say not!" exclaimed Marian. "I predicted he'd be a riot, didn't I? Well, he was a whole uprising!"

"You stayed rather a long time," said Hilda.

"Couldn't help it. Minnie's father and mother came down to the courts. They wanted to talk to him. We lost a lot of time that way. And then Minnie insisted that he ought to see the kennels and the garden, so we didn't play very much tennis, after all."

"And how did you find the kennels and the garden?"

"You don't suppose I bothered going to see them, do you? I let Minnie have him. She seemed to want to."

Marian paused sufficiently to make room for a comment, but Hilda was on her guard.

"First time I ever knew Minnie to be interested in a garden," added Marian. "Well, when they got back from that, we

batted the ball around for a while. Minnie's brother helped; but that was busted up when the two Perkins girls drifted in. They heard about him through the Shinns, so they invented an errand. He's a regular epidemic, I tell you. Everybody who hasn't got him wants him."

"They're welcome," said Hilda, for want of something better.

"So is Wade. He's the welcomest man you ever saw in this neighborhood. I don't know how it is, but every time somebody meets him he gets invited to go somewhere or do something. The Perkins girls have got him next."

"But they only met him—"

Marian snapped her fingers.

"But they'll never keep him, Hilda. You leave that to Minnie Harlan. You know, Minnie doesn't say much. She's a sort of silent operator; but when she gets her eye on a man, he has an awful job trying to find any privacy."

Hilda curled her lower lip.

"I'm not interested in Minnie," she said.

"I'm thinking about us. Did he say anything or do anything that would embarrass us? Do you think anybody could have suspected anything?"

Marian looked at her sister in pity.

"Hilda, you talk as if he was crude. Why, he isn't half as liable to get us into trouble as Kane, or somebody else who's supposed to be the real thing. You don't seem to understand that Wade is an honest-to-goodness gentleman. Embarrass us! A fine chance of that. He knows more about etiquette right now than the Kilbourne family ever will, even if we all live to be a hundred."

"Did he talk about himself?"

"Not Wade! He doesn't need to. They take it all for granted."

"Take what for granted?" asked Hilda.

"Everything. Take it for granted that he's rich, and high-brow, and anything else they happen to think of. He was talking family trees with Minnie."

Hilda became alert.

"Of course, Minnie's a bug on family trees. I don't mean that for a joke, either," said Marian. "I mean she's a nut—no, that's another joke. But you know what I mean—she goes and digs in the ancestral boneyard. And she always drags in the D. A. R."

"Did he talk about his own family tree?"

"I don't think he even shook a leaf off it; but he was very polite about listening to Minnie's. He asked her a lot of questions, and sort of finished off by giving her the idea that blood will tell. Anything like that rings the bell with Minnie."

Hilda shifted in her chair and made a pretense of observing something outside the window. There were some questions she wanted to ask, but she was unwilling to sacrifice her dignity.

"Minnie certainly looked pretty this morning," remarked Marian, after a fairly long pause. She was narrowly watching her sister as she spoke, but Hilda never quivered an eyelid. "Wade thought so."

"He's making a study of the neighbors, is he?"

"I don't know about that; but Minnie is pretty—in spots, anyhow."

"I think she's very pretty," said Hilda.

"That's what Wade said when we were coming back," declared Marian, with a nod.

"Then we are all agreed."

Hilda again glanced out at the tree-tops of Kilbourne Heights. Marian yawned and glanced at the mantel clock.

"I think Minnie expected to be invited over for a swim this afternoon," she said.

"And didn't you ask her to come?" Hilda inquired.

"No. Why should I? Wade's going to teach me the jack-knife. Minnie can't swim, anyhow, and she'd expect him to give her a lesson. I didn't want anybody butting in."

Hilda did not appear to be interested; but she had an idea that she might want to use the pool herself.

"And, by the way," said Marian suddenly, "he won't dine with us to-night. The Harlans insisted on having him over. I think they're going to telephone for you to come, too."

Hilda stiffened.

"I shall have an engagement," she said.

"Who with? Herb Wheeler?"

If Marian had rung a fire-gong or exploded a detonating cap she could not have aroused her sister more profoundly. Hilda whirled in her chair, and there was a startled, suspicious flash in her eyes. Then she caught herself and applied brakes, but they took hold slowly.

"What made you ask that, Marian?" she demanded.

"Why shouldn't I ask?" countered Marian, who made no effort to conceal her own

surprise. "Which reminds me, I haven't seen him since day before yesterday. Anything happened?"

"What is there that could happen?" remarked Hilda carelessly.

"Oh, a lot of things!" replied Marian, watching her sister narrowly.

"Well, nothing has happened, and I have no engagement with him."

Hilda was in command of herself again, but she knew that she had not managed things well. The recrudescence of Mr. Wheeler, even as a topic, had taken her unaware. He had not once been in her thoughts since yesterday afternoon.

"Well, anyhow, I've reported everything," said Marian, still wondering what had happened that involved Herb Wheeler, but knowing it was useless to ask further. "Minnie has an organdie that's a dream!"

"She always dresses beautifully," observed Hilda in a careful tone.

"Puss, puss!" said Marian, and escaped from the room.

Thus it happened that the whole course of Wade Rawlins's life at Kilbourne Heights shifted itself into a new channel. There was something sudden and sensational about the change. It consisted not merely in the effect upon Rawlins himself, but in the reaction upon the entire family. The house guest was not a new phenomenon to the Kilbournes, but they had never entertained the like of this one. Nothing like a neighborhood scramble to take a guest off their hands had ever been known.

The family found itself stirred out of a comfortable summer lethargy. Hilda knew that she was not astonished. She had a conviction that the impostor could travel far; but she was vaguely alarmed—about several things. For one, there was the case of Minnie Harlan. Hilda wondered if it was fair to Minnie; that is, she told herself that she examined the situation from that angle, but without pausing to inquire whether she was wholly frank.

Marian went about in a sort of ecstasy, playing the rôle of adviser, companion, and guide. To Hilda she seemed like the pilot fish that swims with the shark.

Mrs. Kilbourne, still somewhat appalled, slowly adjusted herself to the great transformation, and began to realize that she had, perhaps, been a finger of destiny.

Kane had little to say or do about it; something preoccupied him.

As for Mr. Kilbourne, he took it all just

as seriously as he took the whole game that the neighborhood played—the game of climbing up among the high people.

For Rawlins, the playing of the game was a task of delicacy. There was a demand for constant and careful diplomacies. There were the Kilbournes as well as their neighbors. There was Hilda, there was Minnie Harlan, and often there were both. Although he appeared to sail a free course, he steered cautiously.

Marian helped, to be sure. She was a sort of liaison officer, establishing better points of contact where there was need of them. As an intelligence agent, she was remarkable; but she had the disadvantage of sometimes seizing the initiative and taking the wheel in her own hands, which was disconcerting even to Rawlins, a person of ready mind.

He had, of course, a deeply rooted strategic position of which the neighborhood knew nothing, and of which each member of the Kilbourne family knew only a part.

There was the case of Mr. Wheeler, for instance, which established a certain status with Hilda, if it did not create a bond. Hilda could openly protest nothing.

There was the case of Henry Kilbourne, given to nocturnal drives that ended in jack-pots. Nobody but Rawlins knew, although Marian may have had her private suspicions.

There was Marian's case. If her father discovered that she was given to borrowing the wages of employees, there would be grave danger of a return to the favorite punishment of childhood.

And there was the case of Kane Kilbourne, who did not spend much time trying to plumb the depths of this stranger, but who already held him in a certain awe. There was something that Kane did not regard as family business, and Rawlins had more than a hint of it.

Thus situated, Rawlins seemed like a man equipped to play with dash and confidence; but while the element of dash was not wholly lacking, some of the confidence was perhaps artificial. His difficulty lay in the fact that he did not yet see clearly whither the play led or how the game would end. He was not yet certain even of his purpose. An intuition told him that it was in process of shaping itself, and that he would probably soon discover it clearly; but in the mean time he must carry on, having faith rather than guidance.

It was in a moment when the urge to initiate something ran strong within her that Marian unloaded her mind to Hilda in a sacred confidence.

"I only got it bit by bit," she explained, "and then I had to fairly drag it out of him. It began with a slip on his part, and after that I never let up. If you ever hint that I said a word to you, I'll get square, if it takes me all my life!"

Hilda promised. Any young woman whose curiosity had topped the boiling-point would.

"It's only his modesty," said Marian. "He's afraid we'll think he looks down on us. He doesn't want to seem to be superior. If there's anything he positively hates, it's being lionized."

"Really?" said Hilda, lifting her eyebrows. "I hadn't observed that."

"That's because you don't know him as well as I do."

"I admit, Marian, that I have never made intimates out of mother's tramps."

Marian regarded her sister with a frown of annoyance.

"Oh, well, if you're going to talk like that," she remarked, "I guess you don't really want to know anything about Wade Rawlins."

Hilda found it troublesome to preserve a balance between curiosity and dignity.

"I did not mean that," she said. "Naturally, it's important that I should know something about him. Somebody ought to know, as a matter of protection for the family, if for nothing else."

"I guess I can protect the family," declared Marian stiffly.

Hilda bit her lip. She wanted the story, but she did not wish to have her motives misunderstood. Marian showed symptoms of withdrawing into a shell of mystery.

"I didn't mean that, either—at least, not exactly in that way; but as I'm forced to be in contact with him a great deal, it's only fair that I should know whatever there is in the background."

"Oh, why don't you admit that you're wild with curiosity?" demanded Marian.

"Because I'm not. But—"

Marian interrupted with a burst of sarcastic mirth. Then she relented.

"Listen!" she said, throttling her voice to a whisper. "He comes of a very old Massachusetts family—Mayflower, I think, although he wouldn't go that far with me. There!"

"Is *that* all?" asked Hilda, as Marian paused.

"No, it isn't all. He has a sister who is married to an Italian duke, which makes her a duchess, and they live over there somewhere in a palace. He has another sister who is a sculptor in Paris. He has a brother who is a brigadier-general in the army. His father is dead, but his mother is alive and has loads of money, and she lives in Back Bay, Boston. I guess that's going some."

Hilda admitted the statement with a nod. She was trying to visualize the duchess.

"He's been all over the world," continued Marian; "both before and after he left Harvard. He's had a sort of quarrel with his family. I don't mean it's a regular quarrel; he could fix it up any time he wanted to, but he won't. His mother wants him to go into politics and get to be a Senator, but he declares he won't give up his career."

"His career?" echoed Hilda.

"Uhuh! He has a career. And you'd never guess in all the world."

Marian sat back and watched the effect of the challenge.

"No, I don't believe I could guess," said Hilda guardedly. "What sort of a career is it?"

"He's—" They were talking on the porch, and before she finished her answer Marian tiptoed to the corner to see if there was anybody within ear-shot. "He's an author!" she said hoarsely.

Hilda stared, although she swiftly realized that she was not greatly astonished.

"What sort of an author, Marian?"

"Novels. Is there any other kind?"

He wrote novels! Rawlins? Rawlins? Somehow, she did not place the name.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking about," said Marian. "You can't remember anything he wrote; and you never will, if you keep on trying to think of Wade Rawlins. But just think of—"

She took a swift and cautious look over her shoulder.

"Franklin Fielding!"

"Franklin Fielding!" cried Hilda, half starting from her chair.

"Ss-h!" cautioned Marian. "Now I guess you know who he is."

Did she know? Hilda sat holding her breath. Who didn't know? Franklin Fielding! The five-year sensation of the

fiction world—the man who cut the American people into cross-sections, mounted them on glass slides, thrust them under a microscope, and told the world what he found.

"Marian, are you sure?"

Marian smiled indulgently.

"Certainly I'm sure. He made a slip, and I caught him up; and then he had to confess. Isn't it perfectly wonderful?"

Hilda had no answer to make. She had read Franklin Fielding's latest only the week before—the book that was already selling its tens of thousands, while the reviewers fought their battle to the death. And Franklin Fielding was under the Kilbourne roof. He had even lived in the Kilbourne garage!

"I think it's stupendous," said Marian, when Hilda seemed baffled for words.

"But what—what is he doing here?"

"Well, what would you think?" asked Marian.

Hilda could feel herself turning cold. She was holding her breath again. Then, abruptly, it left her in a great gasp.

"Marian! Not—not—"

"Well, why not?"

The elder sister clung to the arms of her chair. The Kilbourne family was under the microscope!

"Oh, Marian! Why, it's horrible—it's unspeakable!"

"What's horrible about it?" demanded the young savage. "I think it's great. And what he'll do to Grosvenor!"

Hilda was thinking about the family—and herself. Normally, she could rise to emergencies, but now she was shuddering. Franklin Fielding—the man who had no mercy! She shuddered again.

"It's dishonorable!" she cried.

"I don't see it that way at all," remarked Marian nonchalantly. "He'll probably write a perfectly wonderful novel about us, and then all we have to do is to tell everybody we're it, and we're fixed for life. That's the sort of stuff you can't buy for money."

"It's—oh, it can't be true!" moaned Hilda.

"Don't you go around saying it can't be true!" Marian warned her. "Don't you say anything! You promised. And especially don't you *dare* say a word to him! If I ever find you have—well, I'll give him some things to put in his novel!"

(To be continued in the January number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Nerve

A TALE WITH A MORAL OF INTEREST TO YOUNG LAWYERS
AND OTHERS

By William Hamilton Osborne

DURING the course of Peter Twining's last year at Harvard Law School two eventful things occurred. At some undergraduate affair of no particular importance Peter met a girl from El Camino, California. Her name was Imogene. Imogene was demonstrative, appreciative, young. She was stirringly seductive. She was remarkably congenial.

What was more to the point, Peter had been looking for a girl like Imogene for a long, long while. Now that he had found her, during her week's stay in Boston he "rushed" her without stint and without apology; and some instinct told him that his exuberant attentions were not at all unwelcome.

After Imogene had gone back home, Peter continued the connection by means of an endless chain of seemingly innocuous picture postal-cards mailed at spasmodic intervals in Cambridge, and delivered five days later at El Camino, California. What is much more to the point, he received a string of picture postals in return.

About a month before he finished that last year Peter's father died. The elder Twining dropped suddenly one day while crossing a street in the old New Jersey town where the family had its home.

Peter was intensely shocked. His father was a man of forty-eight, a widower. He was Peter's only relative. He was more than that. Aside from Joe Warriner, who was Peter's roommate, he was Peter's closest friend. He was a good sport, an easy-going, lovable, companionable sort of man. Now that it was too late, Peter realized that he hadn't paid as much attention to his father as he might have done.

He felt, too, that he should have told his father all about this girl. Unknown to Peter, the elder Twining had somehow been

part and parcel of his son. He had been Peter's backbone, his guiding star. He had mapped out his son's career, had steered his every course. He had done it with a hand on Peter's shoulder, a chuckle in his ear. He had intended, by his own efforts, to make Peter a far bigger man than he had been himself. The result was, of course, inevitable—Peter, unconsciously, had become dependent upon his father's will.

Peter went to pieces when his father died. He lost his nerve. Somehow or other, though, he worried through until he got his degree. Then he really caved in—so much so, indeed, that Joe Warriner went back to Jersey with him, to help him get things straightened out.

When everything had been cleaned up, Peter found himself in possession of some thirteen thousand dollars—which is a good deal of money for any father in a Jersey town to leave his son these days.

Then Joe Warriner took Peter by the nape of the neck and shook him as a terrier might shake a rat.

"No use your doddering around here, feller," said Joe Warriner. "Be off!"

"Be off where?" asked Peter, dazed.

Joe Warriner felt that it was the duty of every young American to see America, if he but had the price. Across the continent and back, and there you were!

Peter was grateful for the suggestion. Without an instant's hesitation he made his way to the nearest ticket-office and paid the round-trip fare to El Camino, California. Nobody told him to do this. He thought it out himself.

He reached his destination. He looked about him for a day or so. El Camino was then, as now and ever, a blatant, bustling town upon the Coast. Commercial Club billboards setting forth its unique and un-

paralleled advantages met the tourists' eye at every point. Eastern capital was respectfully solicited. Eastern talent was better off at home. To Peter, as he scanned it with a bird's-eye view, the town held two distinctive features. Perhaps a quarter of a mile off-shore were seven curious structures, their trellised frameworks rising far above the surface of the sea. They seemed for all the world like Martians concocting an invasion. As a matter of fact, these were the visible manifestations of seven oil-wells sunk into the bottom of the ocean, seeking out and finding petroleum far, far below its bed. Here was an enterprise which, even to a Harvard man, was well worthy of remark. These operations, Peter found, were conducted by the Ocean Oil Concern.

The other striking feature was a man. This man was the live wire of El Camino. He was the big man of the town, and he conceded it. He lived in the biggest house that could be found within a radius of fifty miles—or maybe more. This man's name was Bartholomew Barker. He had an only daughter of the name of Imogene.

Imogene welcomed Peter Twining with wide-open arms. There were several good reasons. Peter was the only Harvard man in sight. To Imogene another satisfactory reason was that Peter Twining was himself. Peter sojourned in El Camino for a month. He almost forgot that he had had and lost a father. He forgot Joe Warriner with startling ease.

When his month was up, Peter Twining, still the slave of family tradition, paternal influence, and accustomed habit, turned his face once more toward the east. Imogene drove him to the station. The train puffed in. Peter boarded it. That is, he went through the motions. He ascended the steps to the car platform, entered the Pullman, and started down the aisle in the wake of the porter.

He didn't reach his seat. He didn't get that far. Half-way down the aisle he swung about upon his heel, retraced his steps, and dropped from the swiftly moving train. A conductor on the platform tried to hold him back—without success.

"On your way!" yelled Peter. "There's something I forgot!"

Imogene, a lithe and lively young woman, was at his side in an instant, her nose wrinkled up with curiosity, her eyes intense with wonderment.

"Peter!" she cried. "What was it you forgot?"

Peter chuckled emotionally. His chuckle and his emotion were due to his sudden realization that it had all been so easy—the wink of an eyelid, the turn of a wrist. He caught the girl by the arm and led her to her car.

"I forgot," he explained to her, a bit hysterically, "that I want what I want when I want it!"

Imogene stared at him, breathless.

"Which, being interpreted, means—" she demanded.

"It so happens," nodded Peter, "that El Camino is my home!"

II

PETER meant it. Domicil, according to the law reports, is a matter of intention. Peter got busy. He sallied forth to San Francisco, to take an intensive course in State statutes, old, lingering Spanish traditions, and Pacific Coast procedure. In due course he applied for admission to the bar, and in due course he was admitted. He laid in a good working law library and opened an attractive office on the fourth floor of the Commercial Club Building in El Camino. Then, like the good little Harvard man that Peter was, he sat him down and waited.

Waiting, his past life passed in review before him. He vividly recalled sins of commission and sins of omission. It suddenly occurred to him that he hadn't written a letter to Joe Warriner for an age. He wrote one upon his new letterhead, and told Joe what he'd done.

Joe didn't answer the letter—which meant nothing, for Joe very seldom answered letters.

Peter did penance for all his other sins—all that he could recollect. When he had finished, he found himself still waiting. This, too, in spite of a vague and faltering promise on the part of Imogene that she would see to it that papa should throw some business Peter's way.

Papa didn't throw any business Peter's way. Papa was a son of the golden West, and Peter wasn't. Papa felt, too, that Peter was giving him enough trouble cluttering up the house with his Harvard accent. Peter persisted in being among those present, and Imogene persisted in making his young life a merry one.

In this, singularly enough, Bartholomew

Barker didn't interfere. It was a tradition in El Camino that Bart Barker's daughter could have anything she asked for, no matter what it was. Bart Barker ran his business, and he ran the town of El Camino, but he let his daughter run herself.

You can, of course, lead a horse to water, but you can't make him take a drink. Inside his own home Bart Barker now and then recognized the fact that Peter Twining had some sort of an existence. In the busy marts of trade he ignored the fact that Peter Twining was anywhere around. He left Peter wholly to his own devices—and worse than that.

Left wholly to his own devices, Peter might have worried through; but here he contended with a powerful unseen influence. For Bart Barker to withhold his favor meant a boycott, nothing less; and Bart withheld his favor.

He knew exactly what he was doing. His daughter Imogene was an idealist, perhaps, but she was a materialist as well; and Peter Twining, so Bart reasoned, was a weakling. The time would come when Peter would dwindle into failure, and Imogene would have none of him.

While Bartholomew Barker waited for this much-desired consummation, something happened. Peter Twining got a business letter from the father of Joe Warriner. Joe's father was Spalding Warriner, a corporation lawyer in New York. The letter began thus:

MY DEAR MR. TWINING:

You doubtless know already that my boy Joe has started on a trip around the world. He left yesterday for Liverpool. Some time ago he handed me a letter you had written, by which letter it appears that you are in active practise before the bar of California, and have settled down at El Camino in that State.

I represent the Ocean Oil Concern. Seven of its wells are sunk just off your shore. The rest of them are strung all along the coast from Tia Juana north. The Ocean Oil Concern is a New Jersey corporation.

From this point on Joe's father proceeded to explain about the Ocean Oil Concern. It was a close corporation. Starting with a small capital, it had been phenomenally successful, and now had in view a colossal scheme of expansion. It had been considered advisable to pull up stakes in New Jersey, and to incorporate a two-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar company in California. Spalding Warriner desired to give Peter Twining a chance of swinging the job.

Peter gasped. His feeling was one of helpless impotence. To a corporation specialist like Warriner the reorganization of a concern like Ocean Oil may have been a simple matter. To Peter Twining it appeared like an almost superhuman undertaking.

Peter was steeped in the theory of the law. He knew legal rights, legal wrongs, legal remedies. He brought to bear upon this matter all the important decisions he had read. None of them gave him any light upon the subject.

Then Peter woke up. Summoning to his aid that resourcefulness which is universally admitted to be an attribute of every Harvard man, he forced himself swiftly to the conclusion that what Spalding Warriner desired to do in California must have been done in California many times before. He hied him to Sacramento, examined recent corporation records, and selected from a mass of files the organization papers of five or six oil concerns.

Peter copied these verbatim—in doing which he was doing the work of a mere clerk, instead of exercising the mentality of a Harvard Law School graduate. He took his copies back to El Camino. He picked from them the most valuable features. Boldly he plagiarized the creative product of the best legal minds in California. Then he prepared his draft.

As a direct result, the completed set of papers which Peter shipped on to New York for approval were carefully, concisely, and correctly drawn. Spalding Warriner, an old hand at the game, was amazed at the thoroughness of their construction. He made half a dozen trivial suggestions, sent the papers back for final draft, and told Peter incidentally that his son Joe couldn't do a thing like that, not in a thousand years.

III

It was at this point that Bart Barker entered the arena of events—or, at any rate, it was at this point that he came out into the open.

Unknown to Peter, there was a thorn in Bartholomew Barker's side. The thorn was the Ocean Oil Concern. Ever since its advent the Ocean Oil Concern had detracted from Bart Barker's prestige in El Camino; for Bart had had nothing at all to do with the company's presence there. It had never come to him for anything. It had

obtained certain concessions from the State and Federal authorities in its own way; in its own way it had set up its industry in El Camino.

At the present time much of the town's prosperity was due to the Ocean Oil Concern, rather than to Bart Barker's efforts. The town's future might depend upon Ocean Oil; and Bart didn't like it for a cent. In the beginning of things he had tried to scratch Ocean Oil's back, but he couldn't get anywhere near it. Later he had tried to kick it in the slats, but, for the same reason, he had failed.

So for the first time in Peter's brief career it came about that Bartholomew Barker came one day stamping into the young lawyer's office. Bart slumped heavily into a chair, and bent his shaggy brows upon the Easterner.

"I understand," he said, "that you're the counsel for this Ocean Oil Concern."

Peter stared at him with a disconcerting Harvard stare.

"Where did you hear that, Mr. Barker?" he demanded.

Of course his question was superfluous, for he had talked reorganization to Bart Barker's daughter for the last five weeks or so; but Bart Barker dodged.

"Got wind of it down-stairs, at the Commercial Club," he averred.

"Assume," said Peter, "that I am counsel for the Ocean Oil Concern—what then?"

"Nothing particular," replied Bart. "I'm curious to know just how you got their business."

"Oh, as to that," said Peter, "my correspondents in New York—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Bart testily; "but I don't just see—"

"Oh!" chuckled Peter pleasantly. "You know any Harvard man is in demand. Really, there's a pitifully limited supply—"

"Piffle!" snorted Bart Barker.

He was silent for a moment. Then he rose, closed the door, and drew his chair up to the desk.

"Look here!" he said to Peter. "I've got an ax to grind." He shook his finger at the big tripods off the shore. "The only thing around here that I've never had a chance to get is Ocean Oil. Twining, I want a block of stock in that concern!"

With the air of one who held the destiny of nations in the hollow of his hand, Peter slowly shook his head.

"Sorry," he said. "There's not a share of stock for sale."

"There will be with this new deal on," insisted Barker.

"Not so you can notice it," said Peter.

"You positive of that?" asked Barker.

"Positive," said Peter.

Bart Barker leaned across the desk and touched Peter on the arm.

"Look here, Twining!" he pleaded.

"You can wheedle me a little stock out of those fellows in New York."

Peter said he couldn't.

"But you can ask them," persisted Barker.

"I'm not so sure I can," said Peter.

And then and there Bart Barker realized that his treatment of Peter in the past had been a mistake. It was a mistake that he proceeded to rectify forthwith. He put Peter Twining on the El Camino map. He made it clear to the Commercial Club that any man good enough to do the business of Ocean Oil was good enough to take care of any law business that any one in El Camino had to give him.

Bart Barker saw in Peter the missing link that separated him from Ocean Oil. Upon Peter, possibly, depended Bart's future position and prestige in the town.

On the day following Bart Barker's first visit to his office, Peter got another note from Spalding Warriner. In it the New York man acknowledged receipt of certain transcripts and certificates that clinched the incorporation of the new concern. He added:

I don't find your bill among the papers. Will you kindly make it up forthwith? In doing so you will, I take it, regard the custom which entitles me to a one-third portion of your fee. The corporation understands I am to share therein to that extent.

There it was again! Peter must send in a bill, and there was no course at Harvard that covered this. There was nothing in any case that he had ever read about a lawyer's fees for such work.

Again his resourcefulness came to his assistance. A successful lawyer in El Camino ought to make about so much per year. Peter had spent so many weeks upon this matter. Ergo— Well, why not?

Peter sat him at his desk and jotted down all that he had done. He braced himself. He wrote one thousand dollars at the bottom of this list. He shivered as he did it. It was a steal, it was a crime! He couldn't

have earned a thousand dollars so easily—never in the world!

Taking his memoranda with him to the Barker bungalow, he talked the matter out with Imogene.

Imogene figured that a thousand dollars was all right, providing, of course, that Ocean Oil would stand for it. If they wouldn't stand for it, why, of course, then it might be all wrong.

"Why don't you ask papa?" suggested Imogene.

But Peter didn't want to ask papa.

"I'll write and ask Mr. Warriner," he returned.

So he wrote to Spalding Warriner and asked that gentleman if he had any suggestions to make as to the size of the charge for the services in question.

Spalding Warriner replied immediately. He said that unfortunately his position as a director of the company embarrassed him. In the circumstances he felt that he could make no suggestion as to the amount of the bill. He assured Peter, however, that the customary charge in matters of this kind would be wholly satisfactory to the concern.

Now as a matter of fact there wasn't any customary charge; but Peter couldn't be expected to know that. There were four other lawyers in El Camino. Peter went to each of them in turn. The first man suggested five hundred—he was a tyro just like Peter—and the last man five thousand.

"I'm afraid it's beyond me, after all," Peter said to Imogene. "Perhaps I'd better talk to Mr. Barker."

By this time Peter was an accepted suitor for the hand of Bart's daughter. Being such, he made a clean breast of the whole thing to Bart. He told him about Joe Warriner, and how he got the business.

"H-m!" growled Bart. "Better not tell that to anybody else. I've advertised you all over the countryside as the representative of Eastern capital. I don't want to eat my words. You keep mum and I'll keep mum. Now, son, you look here. Five thousand dollars—piffle! I know these New York business men. You say one-third of what you charge goes to this Warriner. All right! The more you get, the more he gets. You charge this oil concern fifteen thousand dollars. That'll give you ten thousand dollars for yourself."

"Fifteen thousand dollars!" gasped Peter Twining. "It's highway robbery!"

"It isn't highway robbery," returned

Bart Barker. "It's the exercise of something that you haven't got much of—plain, ordinary nerve."

"Plain, ordinary nerve—I know!" cried Peter. "But this man is Joe's father. He's a friend of mine. Fifteen thousand dollars! Jumping Jerusalem, I can't charge him that, you know! Ten thousand dollars for myself!"

Imogene was present. The prospect pleased her.

"Peter," she suggested, "think what can happen to us if you get ten thousand dollars for yourself!"

Peter was unconvinced.

"I almost think I ought to do the job for nothing," he faltered. "Joe Warriner did no end of work helping me to settle my father's affairs. Look here, Mr. Barker," he went on, "I don't think I ought to fire it at him raw that way. I think I ought to go back to New York and have a talk with Spalding Warriner. What he can't put in a letter he can tell me face to face."

Bart Barker snorted.

"Warriner will tell you face to face," he said, "and jew you down. You're the kind of lad that can be jewed down, Twining. I know you upside down and inside out. If you go to New York, you'll spill the beans!"

Peter Twining shook his head.

"My best judgment," he persisted, "is to go to New York and have a talk with him. Then I can fix my fee at a figure satisfactory to—"

"Satisfactory to him," cried Barker.

"Well, why shouldn't it be satisfactory to him?" demanded Peter.

"For the very good reason," returned Barker, "that in the first place it's got to be satisfactory to you. That's the guiding star of my young life, Twining! If a thing is satisfactory to me, it goes. If it isn't, then it doesn't go."

"The thing that's satisfactory to me," Peter stubbornly went on, "is to have this thing satisfactory to Mr. Warriner. I'd better go on to New York."

"And have him size you up for what you are," testily cried Barker—"a pettifogger who'll do his work for nothing! Now listen to me, son, once and for all. The way to handle this man Warriner is to handle him at arm's length. To advice and services in the matter of Ocean Oil, fifteen thousand dollars—that's the idea! I know. You stick to me, and you'll wear

diamonds in due course. If you go and see this man, you'll let him size you up and cut you down to two or three thousand. Next time he'll go to San Francisco to a man-size lawyer that commands respect. Now, son, I've tied up to you. I didn't want to do it, but I did. I've stood for you so far as my daughter here is concerned. I've sponsored you in town. Now, you come across! You do as I say, and I'll make a lawyer out of you. Make up your mind to this—if I give advice, I give it expecting you to follow it."

Peter shook his head.

"The only thing for me to do," he kept repeating, "is to run over to New York."

Bartholomew Barker shook his finger under Peter's nose.

"You send in a bill for fifteen thousand dollars," bellowed Bart, "or I'll know the reason why!"

IV

To keep peace in the family, Peter, against his better judgment, sent in his bill for fifteen thousand dollars. On the thirteenth day after he had mailed it he received a check for the full amount. With it was a brief note from Spalding Warriner, in which the writer indicated that he had changed his mind about a certain phase of the matter:

In view of all the circumstances of this case, I have come to the conclusion that I ought not to accept any portion of your fee.

There was something about this letter that startled Peter, and chilled him to the marrow. It was not what Spalding Warriner said, but the frigid atmosphere of the letter. Between its lines it carried swift rebuke.

Peter couldn't point this out to Imogene. Above all, he couldn't point it out to Barker.

Barker read the words and nothing but the words. He gloated over the fifteen-thousand-dollar check.

"My boy," he cried, thumping Peter on the shoulder, "I surely told you so!"

Dolefully Peter shook his head.

"My first mistake," he said. "I should have gone to New York and had a talk with Warriner."

Peter Twining married on the strength of his fifteen-thousand-dollar fee. While he and Imogene were away on their honeymoon, Bart Barker spread broadcast the

story of his son-in-law's big fee. The hero of Bart's story, however, was Bart Barker. It was accounted by all his friends as the slickest thing that he had put over in many moons.

When Peter brought his bride back from their wedding trip, he found that El Camino was regarding him purely and simply as a product of the Barker manufacture. Bart had laid the foundation of Peter Twining's fortunes. From now on, he perceived, all that was necessary was for him to do just as Bart Barker said. Peter's gorge rose, and would not down.

Months later, without warning, Joe Warriner blew into El Camino, on the last leg of his world-wide trip. He descended on Peter like a thousand of brick. They pummeled each other to their heart's content, and Peter dragged Joe off home.

He rounded up a few of the best men in town, and gave a tidy little dinner in honor of Joe Warriner. His father-in-law was on hand, having brought with him a fine selection of seasoned California wines. During the course of the banquet Bart liberally patronized this contraband.

In the midst of the festivities, Joe Warriner leaned suddenly toward Peter.

"By gosh, old-timer!" exclaimed Joe. "I knew there was something. I've got a bone to pick with you. Forgot to tell you. I got a letter from my old man—it reached me at Hong-Kong. Peter, my old man is sore as blazes—"

"At me?" cried Peter Twining, shivering as he said it.

"At you," returned Joe Warriner. "You sent him in a bill."

"He registered a kick?" asked Peter.

"He sure did—on the amount," grinned Joe. "You charged him ten thousand dollars, didn't you? Was it for Ocean Oil?"

Bart Barker answered him. Bart winked at his confrères of the Commercial Club gathered about the table.

"Fifteen thousand was the charge," he told Joe Warriner. "Fifteen thousand dollars for the reorganization of Ocean Oil into a company with a quarter of a billion capital." He waved his hand toward Joe, and chuckled. "That was my doing, young man. I fixed that fee, and I take the blame for it. I told my son-in-law just what to charge."

"Joe," cried Peter Twining, "I should have done what I laid out to do. I should have gone to New York. I should have

talked to your father face to face. You tell him that from me. If I had done so, this wouldn't have happened, Joe. Next time, you can stake your bottom dollar, I'll follow my own instincts, and take no advice!"

Bart Barker chuckled some more, and winked some more at his colleagues.

"He wanted to go to New York and get jewed down," said Barker. "He wanted to go to New York and spill the beans; but I wouldn't let him. A fair fee is a fair fee, I say, and there's an end of that!"

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right,"

smiled Joe Warriner, to Bart Barker. Then he turned again to Peter Twining. "Peter," he said, "I'll fix this up with father somehow. You can rely on me for that; but it's a confounded shame that you didn't go to New York and have a talk with him. You see, Peter, this Ocean Oil Concern, my father tells me, had set aside one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to pay California counsel in the matter of the reorganization of the company, and my father expected to get fifty thousand of that as his share of your fee!"

When Homer Nods

THE STORY OF A LUCKY VENTURE IN LOVE AND HORSEFLESH

By Berton Braley

HOMER BREEZE had reached the age of twenty-five without acquiring any more of this world's goods than three suits of clothes—a tuxedo and two sack suits—and such shirts, socks, shoes, and ties as were necessary to complete the outfit. But by the grace of Providence, which had equipped him with one of the figures that all young men possess in the clothing advertisements, he always looked as if tailored by Fifth Avenue's master sartorialists.

This happy knack of wearing raiment with an air, together with a pleasant smile, a ready and witty tongue, and a manner ingratiating without sycophancy, had brought him not a few acquaintances in a prosperous and rather horsey set. The start of that acquaintance came in the army when, as captain in a cavalry regiment, he was a member of a mess containing several polo-players and one man who owned a racing-stable.

Once out of the army and back to his job as city salesman for a wholesale millinery house, Homer found riding beyond his means; but he continued to keep in touch with his war-time buddies, who couldn't help liking him, and of course he met a good many of their womenfolk.

There isn't much snobbery among horse-lovers, and hardly any one showed prying curiosity as to Homer's means or antecedents. He was accepted as a decent young chap who knew a lot about horses, though he rode none of his own.

All might have gone exceedingly well—or smoothly, anyhow—if Homer hadn't met Jacqueline Gray, sister of Jim Gray, who owned the racing-stable mentioned earlier in this story.

One can't blame Homer for falling in love with Jacqueline, who was pretty in the tweed suits she affected, prettier in her mannish riding-togs and smart knickerbockers—especially astride a horse—and prettiest in the filmiest and clingiest of evening gowns.

"Some filly!" remarked Homer when he first saw her, as she put her big gray over a four-barred gate at Dorlan's.

"I'll say she is!" agreed Jim Gray. "I paid six thousand bucks for that hunter, and I've won every prize at every show since."

"I don't mean the horse," said Homer. "I mean the girl. Who is she?"

"Oh!" Jim Gray laughed. "That's Jack, my sister. She really isn't half bad, as girls go. I'll introduce you when she

comes around here. She's a nice kid—you'll like her."

His prophesy fell short of the fact, for after five minutes' chat Homer was in a state of complete idiocy over Jacqueline Gray; and though she was not quite as much overcome as he, Jack almost instantly discovered in Homer a fellow spirit.

The proximate result was that Homer began spending more money than he could afford on the hire of horses in order to ride with Jacqueline. Furthermore, he found it necessary to add to his three suits a riding-outfit, and the price thereof appalled him. In fact, he couldn't have stood the pace at all, but for the fact that he had been introduced at Dorlan's by Jim Gray, and the management seemed anxious to extend him credit—as was the tailor to whom Gray sent him.

In the first flush of his infatuation for Jack he forgot the reckoning which loomed more terrible as time went on; but after two weeks or so he began figuring on the obligations he was heaping up, and the total threw him into a depression on which Jack had rallied him more than once.

His absorption in this problem on the night of the horse auction at Dorlan's was so complete that, as he stood beside Gray in the ring near the auctioneer's stand, he was utterly unaware of what his friend was saying. He nodded and said "yes" and smiled as Gray enthused over the various horses put up for sale; and all the while he was saying to himself:

"What shall I do? How am I going to get out of this mess? Where can I borrow the money to pay those debts? What an ass I am!" and other musings equally unsatisfactory.

A big man on a coal-black hunter, sixteen hands high, went around the ring exhibiting the paces of the horse. As he swung around the crowd his leg brushed against Breeze, and for an instant Homer's attention was drawn to the animal.

"He's a beauty," he said to Gray. "I'd like a mount like that!"

"I don't think so much of him," Gray demurred. "He's too big in the barrel."

Homer's eyes took in the black's proportions swiftly as the horse stopped within the ropes in front of the auctioneer's stand.

"No!" he said. "That's just a bit of fat. He isn't trained down enough; but he's a superb horse."

The auctioneer began calling for bids.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "here's one of the best horses we've put up to-night—Muhammed Noir—sixteen hands, four years old, sound and strong. Look him over and make me an offer. You've seen his paces, you can see his condition right here. Here's a potential show horse if there ever was one. Make me a bid to start him. Any bid? Who'll say five hundred? Who'll say five hundred?"

The auctioneer surveyed the crowd, searching for a bidder. At the same moment Homer, gazing up toward the balcony back and above the auctioneer, caught a glimpse of Jacqueline leaning over the rail. The auctioneer, noting the eager look on Homer's face, fixed him with a questing eye.

"Who'll say five hundred?" he repeated.

At that instant Gray, at Homer's side, asked:

"Do you think they'll get even five hundred for him?"

Homer, hearing him vaguely, but still gazing past the auctioneer at Jacqueline, nodded.

"Thank you, sir!" the auctioneer shouted. "I'm bid five hundred for Muhammed Noir. Who'll say six hundred? Who'll say six? I'm bid five—who'll say six?"

Somewhere on the other side of the crowd another man offered six hundred. The auctioneer continued his exhortations, and as Homer still stared up at the balcony the price of Muhammed Noir gradually rose until there came a pause at nine hundred and fifty dollars.

"Nine hundred and fifty I'm bid—who'll say a thousand?" the auctioneer coaxed. "Ladies and gentlemen, you'll seldom have a chance to bid on so fine a horse. He should have been started at a thousand, but I'm here to sell him, he must be sold, and he's going at nine fifty. Nine fifty once, nine fifty twice, nine fifty—quick! Do I hear a thousand?"

Homer, seeking to catch Jacqueline's eye, had not even heard the bidding. He was unaware that the auctioneer had accepted his first nod as a bid for Muhammed Noir.

The auctioneer was watching him narrowly, thinking his look of intense interest was in the bidding.

"Nine fifty, nine fifty!" he cried. "Who'll say a thousand? I want a thousand. Who'll say a thousand?"

Just then Homer caught Jack's eye across the arena; she smiled brilliantly and waved. Homer, with a joyous grin, nodded.

Then, satisfied for the moment, he turned again to Gray and began talking rather excitedly about nothing in particular. He wasn't interested in the bidding, and he had forgotten all his troubles, for hadn't he received a smile from Jack?

And it wasn't until the auctioneer's clerk touched him on the arm that he realized he had anything to do with what had been going on in the ring.

"May I have your deposit, sir?" asked the clerk.

"Deposit?" repeated Homer stupidly. "What for?"

"It's the custom," said the clerk. "One-fifth down and the rest when you take the horse. Two hundred dollars in this case, since you bought Muhammed Noir for a thousand dollars."

"I bought—" began Homer, and then he remembered his nods. "So I did," he said. "So I did." He tried to act as if he bought so many horses that he had quite forgotten this one. "But, you see, I wasn't aware of that custom, and I don't happen to have more than fifty dollars with me. My ignorance will probably cost me a fine horse. I'm sorry, but you can put him up again."

"Nonsense!" said Jim Gray. "They'll do nothing of the sort. You liked the horse—he's yours. Here"—he opened his purse and took out two hundred-dollar bills—"here's Mr. Breeze's deposit. Tell Mr. Dorlan to keep Muhammed Noir at Mr. Breeze's service until he gets around to pay for him. So that's that," he added, patting Homer on the shoulder. "I never carry any money to speak of myself," he added; "only to-night I'm bidding on Yellow Hornet, and I came heeled. You can fix up the rest with Dorlan whenever you get around to it. Say, isn't that Jack waving to you from the balcony? Don't let me keep you." He grinned. "I'm sticking around for the sale of Yellow Hornet, but if you two don't want to wait I'll see you at the house later."

Homer, thus dismissed, made his way through the crowd and toward the balcony stairs. He moved in a sort of stupor, for he hadn't yet quite grasped what had happened. Half-way up the steps he paused as the truth came home to him.

"My God!" he said aloud. "I've bought a horse!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the man who was descending. "Were you speaking to me?"

"No," replied Homer. "I'm sorry—I was just thinking out loud."

He went on, climbing the stairs, and with almost every step he repeated:

"I've bought a horse, I've bought a horse!"

But there was no enthusiasm in his thoughts; and even Jacqueline's warm handshake and welcoming smile couldn't dispel his absorption.

"My gracious, Homer!" she said. "What makes you look so glum?"

"I've bought a horse," he said.

"Yes, I saw you," she agreed; "and I think he's a wonderful bargain. Why should you be glum about that?"

For an instant confession was on Homer's tongue. He would tell Jacqueline how it happened. He would confess that he was throwing a bluff and living beyond his means, and that his depression was due to the whole situation, now aggravated by his new and maniacal purchase. He felt sure she would understand, for she was no snob; and besides, even if she were, it was the only fair thing to do.

Yes, but—suppose she told other people; suppose she proved to be a snob, and not only cast him out but told other people what a four-flusher he was! Well, if she was that kind of a girl, he wouldn't lose much.

Then he looked at Jacqueline again, and he knew that whatever kind of a girl she was he would love her just the same. He didn't dare take the chance of a confession that might lose her for him. He would wait for the grand catastrophe. He was safe for to-night, anyway.

"I was a little worried about whether I'd been stung or not," he said; "but since you think I got a good horse—and I think so myself—it's all right."

"Why, Homer," said Jack, "I know that horse, and he's wonderful. In a year or two he'll be taking prizes away from Yellow Hornet. I urged Jim to buy him, but he didn't think much of him. Just the same, he's wrong and you're right. Jim doesn't always know as much as he thinks he does about horses. And now let's not wait for Jim. There's a little party on up at the house, and I'm just dying to dance with you. Did I ever tell you that you're the noblest dancer in the wide jazz world?"

Homer's mind never recurred to the matter of horses until, having kissed Jack for the first time just before he left, he walked up the steps of his boarding-house and found himself repeating aloud at each step:

"I've bought a horse, I've bought a horse. Good grief, I've bought a horse!"

II

THE repercussion of heavy trouble is often despair; but the repercussion of calamity is frequently hope. Homer Breeze had viewed his difficulties over horse-hire and proper costuming as depressing and nearly insuperable, but the calamity of having bought a horse for a thousand dollars stirred something in him which hitherto had been dormant. Perhaps it was ambition, perhaps it was egotism or false pride, but he came to the office the next morning, despite his almost sleepless night, with a new vigor in his step.

He hadn't any more idea what he was going to do with Muhammed Noir than after Gray had paid the deposit on the hunter; but he had the cheerful feeling that things couldn't be much worse than they were, and—after all, wasn't it a magnificent gesture? He'd bought a horse!

Business hadn't been very good in the wholesale millinery trade, and there was a rumor about the house of Jones & Morganstern that a reduction in the sales force was impending. Homer Breeze had not been a howling success as an order-getter, though he had probably earned his moderate salary; and he didn't think that even his status as a returned soldier would save him when his summons came. He was unmarried, too, while most of the other salesmen had given hostages to fortune.

This situation had intensified his anxiety over the earlier extravagance due to his rides with Jack; but now that such debts were mere small change, he found himself facing the contingency of joblessness with no particular tremors. There's something heroic in riding a deluge, while wet feet are merely inconvenient—and cold.

When he was told by a maliciously smiling office-boy that Mr. Jones wanted to see him in the office, he marched into the presence of the senior partner with all the aplomb of a seasoned cotillion-leader about to conduct his eightieth ball.

A word about Mr. Jones, *né* Janetsky. He was born on the lower East Side and started business in Houston Street with one

operator—himself. His parents were orthodox Jews from Russia, and spoke Yiddish only. They were miserably poor; but by the time Israel Janetsky was ten years old they had learned a good deal of American, because neither Israel nor any of his six brothers and sisters would learn Yiddish. He was more American, was Israel, than many a son of seven generations descended from the thrifty traders who stole Manhattan from the Indians.

As soon as his shop moved from Houston Street to Fifth Avenue, Israel joined an Episcopal church and changed his name to Jones. It was one of his deepest sorrows that he couldn't get Morganstern to drop his membership in the synagogue and the last syllable from his name; but Morganstern remained Morganstern, and his money and brains could not be spared from the firm.

To be entirely frank, Jones, as you may already have guessed, was somewhat of a climber and a good deal of a snob. His gentle wife had something to do with this fact. She had married Jones partly, though not wholly, for his money, and she was impatient to make that money get them somewhere socially.

With which introduction we return to Homer's entrance.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Jones?" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Breeze. I may as well be frank and brief. Business, as you know, has been slow, and prospects are not very bright. We feel that our organization—"

Homer waved a careless hand.

"All leading up to the glad news that I am fired," he opined.

"Well," soothed Mr. Jones, "I wouldn't put it just in that way. Say a temporary leave of absence until matters clear up. We appreciate your services, and your personality is—"

"I know—my smiling face and pleasant manner are personal assets which you must painfully force yourself to do without," interrupted Homer. "You trust we part with no hard feelings. You will keep me in mind, of course, and as soon as business picks up—"

Mr. Jones laughed.

"You're stealing my stuff, Mr. Breeze," he admitted. "I'm glad you take it so cheerfully. Of course we'll give you two weeks' pay, and—am I right in judging that you have something else in view?"

Homer threw out his chest a little as he replied:

"Well, in a way. I'm going into business for myself."

"That's excellent!" said Mr. Jones.

"May I ask what line? Millinery?"

"No," said Homer, "not millinery."

He paused, because he hadn't the slightest idea what business he was going to name. Suddenly into his mind came that reiterated phrase of the night before: "I've bought a horse!"

"Horses," said Homer.

"Horses!" repeated Mr. Jones.

"Horses," said Homer, again waving his hand with a gesture that included the whole horse kingdom. "I've already swung a nice little deal with Jim Gray, and I expect to broaden out."

"Jim Gray!" repeated Mr. Jones. "Is that Gray, the horseman, of Gray & Bower?"

"The same man," said Homer. "Nice chap, too—in the army with me."

"H-m!" mused Mr. Jones. "You're quite close to Mr. Gray?"

There was a subdued eagerness in Jones's voice, and Homer caught it; but he didn't make the mistake of boasting.

"Oh, we're tolerably well acquainted through the army and—business matters," he remarked.

His tone conveyed a subtle suggestion that he didn't care to discuss social intimacies too minutely.

Jones rose swiftly to the bait.

"I'm a great lover of horses myself," he said. "Perhaps you don't know, Mr. Breeze, that my riding horse, Glimmering Dawn, took a blue ribbon at the horse show last year?"

"Do you own that horse?" exclaimed Homer with genuine enthusiasm. "Funny I didn't know that. It's a glorious animal, Mr. Jones! You have a right to be proud of him."

"I am," admitted Jones; "but I was going to add that I've often thought it would be interesting to combine sport with business, and perhaps take a little flier in horses. I'm not much of a gambler"—Homer smiled, for he knew that Jones was one of the most daring gamblers in the millinery business—"but I confess that my besetting vice is playing the races. It's cost me a lot of money, and that's why the idea of making money out of horses appeals to me. Now, if you think you could use a silent

partner in your deals, I might be able to supply a little capital. Do you think Mr. Gray would object?"

Homer considered for a moment. He wanted to make a flying leap at Mr. Jones and shout:

"Gimme the money!"

He restrained himself, however, and continued to consider. Mr. Jones waited, and Homer readily detected that he was waiting anxiously.

"Why, no," Homer said at last. "I don't believe he would. As a matter of fact, his interests are so diversified that he can't conveniently spare all we need; so if you care to go in to the extent of—"

Homer stopped again. He was just going to say "a thousand dollars," when it occurred to him that such a sum was ridiculous in the light of his broad mention of "horses."

Mr. Jones pulled his check-book toward him as Homer hesitated over the amount. Then he drew a deep breath and plunged.

"Of course we're going into things on a comparatively small scale at first," he said, "and we won't need large capital immediately. I'm not contributing much money, because buying and selling and judging horses constitutes my end of it; but another five thousand dollars would be useful just now."

"That's moderate enough," replied Mr. Jones, writing a check. "I hope you're not being too moderate. Can't do much without capital, these days!"

"Five thousand will do now," said Homer. "Later, if we do well with our first deals, we can expand, and I may call on you for more."

He took the check, folded it, and put it into his pocketbook.

"I'll have my lawyer draw up a contract of partnership, Mr. Jones," he said grandly. "Meanwhile, if you want a receipt—"

Mr. Jones rose and bowed.

"I trust my partner, Mr. Morganstern," he said. "I think I can trust my partners, Breeze and Gray. When the contract is ready, send me a copy for signature. And here's good luck to you and to the firm, Mr. Breeze!"

He shook hands with the millinery salesman whom he had just fired, and accompanied him to the door of the office.

"What 'd he do—give you a raise?" asked the telephone girl, as Homer swaggered past her.

"Nope!" said Homer. "In me you see a jobless vagabond, fired forthwith from his regular means of livelihood. Free and untrammelled I ride away with all the world before me!"

"That's the darnedest queer way to act for a man who's been canned," exclaimed the telephone girl to the office-boy, as the door closed behind Homer. "You'd think he'd just had news that his millionaire aunt had died!"

"Aw, you never can tell about these army guys," said the office-boy.

III

SOMETHING had happened almost overnight to Homer's attitude toward finance. Contemptuous as he had been in the past about nickels, dimes, quarters, and occasionally dollars, he had always regarded a thousand dollars as "important money." It had never seemed more important to him than when he owed it for a horse he couldn't pay for. But the casual manner in which Jim Gray had lent him two hundred, and the matter-of-fact way in which his friend had spoken of the buying of Muhammed Noir, colored his own imagination similarly. When Mr. Jones had spoken of the five-thousand-dollar check as "moderate," the alteration in his attitude was almost complete.

So, while the check nestled gratefully in his new pigskin wallet, Homer, though elated, was neither highly excited by the amount it represented nor staggered by the responsibility. He still had no idea just how he was going to make good on his large reference to "horses," but he felt confident that inspiration would come.

"Anyhow," Homer said to himself as he waved to a taxi in a lordly fashion, "I know horses! As a matter of fact, I know 'em a lot better than I ever did hats. Yet I sold hats—not enough hats to keep my job when business is slow, but quite a few. I ought to be able to sell horses. Why not? I've bought one!"

It was the desire to look over his purchase, as well as to complete the payment for it, that led him to tell the taxi-driver to take him to Dorlan's. On the way, however, he stopped at the Textile Bank, where he was known, and deposited his check.

"Hello!" commented the receiving teller, as he glanced at the figures. "What's this—Jones using you as a dummy in a stock transaction?"

"Well, you might call it a stock transaction," said Homer; "but I'm no dummy. So-long!"

At Dorlan's, Homer dropped into the office and gave his check for Muhammed Noir, then he went down to the stables to look over his buy.

The horse had just been curried and brushed, and his sleek sides shone. As Homer stepped into the stall beside him, Muhammed turned his fine head and eyed his owner with big, intelligent eyes. Then, as Homer patted his nose and put an arm over his neck, he whinnied contentedly.

"Like me, old top?" queried Homer softly.

This was not a new experience for Breeze. It was a saying in his regiment that Homer must be "part horse, the way animals fell for him."

For answer, Muhammed nuzzled his shoulder.

"You're a beauty!" Homer said affectionately. "Only the trouble is that I shall have to sell you, and then I shall feel badly about it. A horse-dealer hasn't any business to have personal feelings about his stock in trade; but it'll be a wrench to let a good horse go every time I do it, and I don't intend to buy anything but good horses. You're a bit too fat, old-timer. You need exercise!"

Suddenly Homer remembered that Jacqueline Gray would probably be riding in the park at about this hour. He called to a groom.

"I can hire a saddle here, can't I?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"All right—saddle Muhammed for me. I think I'll take a canter. Haven't my riding-togs with me, but I'll do without them to-day."

It isn't so hard to find anybody on the bridle-paths of Central Park, if you know their favorite rides. Homer caught a glimpse of Jack soon after Muhammed's hoofs began digging into the loose earth.

"Oh, rats!" said Homer. "She isn't alone."

Nevertheless he galloped on and overtook Jack and her escort.

"I couldn't wait until I got on my riding-clothes," he explained, after he had been introduced to Graham Baldrick, the other man. "I wanted to try out my horse right away."

"How do you like him?" asked Jack.

"He's a corker!" Homer declared. "I've never ridden a better animal. Full of spirit and fire, yet he's easy to handle, and he can do anything from single-footing to running a mile in nothing whatever."

"A little big in the barrel, isn't he?" asked Baldrick.

"Fat," said Homer. "He's been eating his head off in some stable. I'll soon have that off him."

"I'd like a good horse myself," said Baldrick. "This one I hired. My old horse is out in the country—too old to ride much, anyway. I intended to get in to the auction last night, but couldn't make it. I thought I might bid on Muhammed Noir," Baldrick continued. "Somebody told me—why, I guess it was you, Miss Gray—that he'd be a good horse for me. What did he sell for, Miss Gray?"

"A thousand dollars," said Jack. "Mr. Breeze was—"

"I was at the auction," interrupted Homer, "and I think even the bidder who got him was surprised to get him at the price."

Jack, puzzled, glanced inquiringly at Homer, who winked.

"Yes, it was a wonderful bargain," she exclaimed. "Too bad you weren't there to bid!"

Homer gave her a grateful smile.

"Why, a thousand dollars is no price for any kind of a riding horse these days," mourned Baldrick. "I would gladly have paid fifteen hundred for Muhammed Noir, if I had been there."

"Would you pay fifteen hundred now?" queried Homer.

"In a minute," said Baldrick, "simply on Miss Gray's remark that he is a fine horse. She knows horses."

"It's a deal," declared Homer.

"I don't understand," Baldrick said.

"This is Muhammed Noir," Homer answered, patting the smooth neck of his mount. "Do you want him? I know it's a *faux pas* to do business while on pleasure bent, but—well, if I rode Muhammed again I'm afraid I should be too fond of him to sell him."

"You've sold a horse," said Baldrick promptly. "I'll give you a check when we get to Dorlan's. I hope"—he turned to Jack—"you don't object to our swapping horses in the middle of the bridle-path?"

Jack laughed.

"Any time is a good time to buy a horse," said she, "or to sell one!"

Homer nodded.

The fact that some six months later he was to see Muhammed Noir sold for forty-five hundred dollars might have somewhat diminished his present satisfaction; but of course he couldn't know that. The man who first sold Man o' War has at least the consolation that he sold a good horse.

IV

WHATEVER happiness Homer felt over the consummation of his first deal was somewhat clouded by the prospect of explaining to Jim Gray how he had been brought into a partnership without consultation beforehand.

Homer was inclined to put this off, trusting that fate or luck or time would bring counsel, as they had with his dilemma of the night before; but here Jacqueline interfered with the scheme.

"You're coming up to dinner with us to-night," she announced, as they stood in the glass-enclosed waiting-room at Dorlan's. "Jim told me to bring you. You haven't any other engagement, have you?"

"No," said Homer. "I mean—oh, all right, I'll come!"

"How eagerly you accept!" smiled Jack.

"Well, you see," said Homer, "I was planning to ask you to take dinner with me. I didn't know Jim was—"

"Jim said"—Jacqueline blushed just a little—"that he had an engagement for the evening, so I'd have to entertain you after he left."

"There is nothing like the loyalty of a true friend," commented Homer. "I shall be there!"

"Jim," said Homer, as they lighted their cigars after dinner—Jacqueline had left them to themselves for a while—"I want to give you a check for that two hundred right now before I forget it."

"No rush," said Jim. "Don't let it bother you."

"I'd rather give it to you now while I think of it," Homer replied casually.

He wrote the check. It was somewhat disingenuous of him to mark it "No. 486."

"And now that's off my mind," Homer remarked, "I have a confession to make."

"If you haven't poisoned a horse," Jim smiled, "I guess I can stand it."

"The fact is," Homer began, "I've rather taken advantage of your social position in a business way."

"If my social position—whatever that is—can help your business any, shoot!" responded Jim.

"Well," Homer explained, "it's like this. I—I happened to mention to Jones, of the firm of Jones & Morganstern—they're in millinery, as you may know—that—well, I'm afraid I gave him the impression that this deal on Muhammed Noir amounted to more than it does, and he sort of jumped to the conclusion that you and I were associated in buying and selling horses. You know he's a bit of a climber, and he immediately asked if we couldn't use a little more capital. I had just made up my mind that I was going to give up my former work—I was in the wholesale millinery trade—and go into horses. Buying Muhammed gave me the idea. Jones's offer came at a time when I needed money—that is, a little more capital, and—well, I'm afraid he thinks he's a member of the firm of Gray, Breeze & Jones, horse-dealers."

Jim threw back his head and laughed.

"Homer, you're a wonder!" he exclaimed. "I don't know anything about Mr. Jones, but I'll say that the Breeze part of the firm is not likely to be greatly troubled by the wiles of other horse-traders. Consider the firm established, old man! How much money do you want from me? It'll be a genuine relief to make some money on horses after the years I've been spending it on them!"

"That's what Jones said, too," observed Homer; "but just at present I think the use of your name will be sufficient. Mr. Jones was generous, and I had a little money myself."

His conscience pricked him considerably at this, for though it cannot be denied that fourteen dollars is "a little money," Homer knew that his manner of mentioning it was not exactly frank.

"I'd like to meet my other partner some time," said Jim, "and congratulate him on his business acumen in picking a general manager. Whenever you want more capital, let me know. You'll excuse me, old man, if I beat it now. I've got to meet a chap at the club. Here's Jack. Jack, meet the president and general manager of the firm of Gray, Breeze & Jones!"

The general manager of the new firm, left alone with Jacqueline Gray, found himself suddenly bereft of words. Aside from their rides together and the few moments the night before when, in the moonlight, he had

kissed her, Homer had seen Jacqueline mostly in crowds, small or large. Now, with a whole evening before him, and Jack for that whole evening, it seemed that all he could do was to sit and look at her.

That was a pleasant enough occupation, because Jack was surely good to look at. Homer thought he never had realized how pretty she was, how utterly desirable, and how supremely kissable.

Kissable—that was it! Suddenly he decided that sitting and looking at her was not enough.

"Homer," said Jacqueline, "you haven't said a word for ten minutes. You've just sat there and stared at me. Are you going to spend a whole evening just sitting there and staring at me?"

"No," said Homer, "I'm not!" He laid down his cigar, rose to his feet, crossed to her chair, and, reaching down, picked her up in his arms. "I'm going to spend the whole evening making love to you!" Whereupon he kissed her. "That is," he added, smiling down into her eyes, "if you'll let me!"

"To kiss me, of course, you will have to use force," quoted Jack softly. Then, in a whisper very close to his ear, she went on: "'and Lord knows you are stronger than I am!'"

V

THE firm of Gray, Breeze & Jones is still a growing concern; but it has made so much money that the managing director no longer thinks of five thousand dollars as important money, though he recognizes it as a highly respectable amount. Much of the success of the firm is due to the fact that within the limits of human judgment as to horseflesh, Gray, Breeze & Jones are honest. Honesty in horse-dealing is rare enough to be a huge asset to a firm which cares to cultivate it.

Nowadays, when Homer nods in the buying-ring, it means something. He doesn't buy any more horses inadvertently. Lest he might, he makes it a strict rule not to engage in conversation when an auction is going on.

"For," as he said to Jack, the day before they were to be married, "that kind of luck is all right for a starter, but if you play it all through you'll be stung with a bunch of skates!"

The remark followed a long and somewhat stammered and painful confession, to

which Jack listened with a very serious face.

"So you see, dear," said Homer, "I was nobody, and I am still nobody—just a millinery salesman who was throwing a bluff, just a piker who happened to stumble into the most extraordinary luck. I should have had the courage to tell you this before, I know, but I didn't have. I hope you'll forgive me; but if you can't, it's not too late to let me go."

"But it is too late—much too late," said Jack, with a frown. "My trousseau is all ready, the invitations are all out, and it would be a frightful scandal if we didn't get married now. It's too late for another reason, too."

"What's that?" demanded Homer.

"Because I love you," said Jack. "Your confession would have been too late any time after I first met you—too late to prevent me from marrying you, I mean. Why, my dear, one of these silly little gossiping snobs that you find everywhere came to me the very first night we met and told me that you were nobody, as they said, and as you said; and I almost slapped her face. Nobody—you, nobody! Nobody—with a Croix de Guerre! Nobody—with the sweet-

est smile, and the strongest arms in the world to creep into like this—and the merriest, tenderest eyes in the world! Nobody—where do they get that stuff? Why, honey, when you bought Muhammed Noir, Jim knew you didn't have the money to pay for him. He was going to take Muhammed off your hands the next day. He was going to give you a nice job with his firm, too; because he told me you were the finest chap he ever met, and that if I didn't somehow manage to marry you he'd spank me. He said he knew you'd make good—and you did, though not in the way he'd planned. My dear, the only thing I feel badly about is that you were afraid to tell me before. I take that as a reflection on my character, for it shows you thought I might be somewhat of a snob. If it hadn't been for my work in the motor corps, perhaps I would have been; but it's all right, dear—everything is all right. Only I want you to make me one promise."

Homer waited.

"And that is that you'll make all your confessions, after we're married, right away, instead of waiting until I find them out for myself. Will you?"

Homer nodded.

LOVERS' VOWS

You say you love me—is it true?
Are you quite sure you know?
For some have said the same as you,
And meant it, too.

As long as rivers flow
And skies are blue,
They said.

As long as birds shall sing
And grass be green in spring,
They said;

As long as suns shall rise
And stars be in the skies,
They said;

They meant it, too—
And yet it was not true;
For some forgot what they had said,
And some are dead.

Richard Leigh

Madeleine*

THE REMARKABLE NOVEL THAT WON THE GONCOURT PRIZE
OF 1920

By Ernest Pérochon

XXXI

ONE Sunday Madeleine took the children to Coudray. Her mother had been ailing all winter, and had spent long days in bed. She reproached Madeleine for coming so seldom to see her.

"And there's rent," she said. "You are behind the others, my daughter; this time your sisters have paid first. In the state I'm in, I need help."

Madeleine blushed.

"You do right to scold me; but I am going to pay to-day. I brought the money with me."

She drew out first a gold piece, then a silver piece.

"There are twelve francs," she said.

The mother was astonished. Usually Madeleine, saying that she was the eldest and earned more than her sisters, insisted on paying the larger share.

"I see you are not rich just now," said her mother. "You must be spending a good deal."

Madeleine blushed again. She opened her purse, took a five-franc piece, then one of two francs, but decided finally on a single franc.

"No, I am not rich," she replied; "but I can give you a little more."

She might have added:

"I gave money to my brother who swore never to ask me again; and these children—I have bought them so many things that my wages are all spent."

But it would have been very difficult for her to say these things; they were secrets that she did not care to reveal.

Lalie was on her knee, and she hugged the child tighter.

"Is this the little one who was burned?"

asked her mother. "I have never seen her since the accident. Did she suffer much?"

"Oh, if you knew! If you knew!"

Then Madeleine told the whole story, describing the fire and the accident, the visit of the doctors and of the sorceress. She told of other troubles—the colds that the children had had, and little Joe's measles. Her mother smiled.

"You love them as if you were their mother!"

"Yes," said Madeleine, "I do."

"You've been there four years now, and you'll probably be there much longer, since Corbier doesn't seem to marry again. You must have a lot of work."

"I should say I had, but I like it. What worries me is that I have so little time to take the children out. Even to-day I can't stop. I ought to be going now."

"So soon?"

"Yes, I'm alone there with one hand. Michel went away early, I don't know where—to town, perhaps, as he was dressed in his best. I have to be at home to oversee everything."

"Wait at least till I get a slice of bread and jam for the children."

"You spoil them, mother," said Madeleine, with a beaming face. "They'll always be tormenting me to bring them here."

Then she hunted in her purse and found another coin, which she added to the others.

On the way home the children lagged behind, munching their bread and jam. Madeleine went along in front, smiling. For some time now she had been happy; little by little her courage had come back.

"You've been there a long time," her mother had said.

A long time! Why, she would be there always!

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"Come along, Joe; we must hurry."

The child was lingering at a cross path.

"Look, Nène!"

Madeleine looked, and saw her sister, Tiennette, hurrying along the path, and in tears. The younger girl climbed a stile and began to speak, in great distress.

"I am on my way home," she said. "I can't stop there any longer. I'm not a thief! As for the rest, I could let it pass, but not that. I will never go back there! Last year they treated me all right, but now I don't know what is the matter."

Madeleine took her hands and drew her down to a seat by the road.

"What has happened? Tell me all about it."

"I'm not a thief!" cried her sister. "I don't know why they should suspect me. I have done nothing I'm ashamed of!"

After a little Tiennette explained. She was working at a farm in a village near Chantepie, where she had been for two years. At first all went well with the family and the other servants; but at All Saints some new hands had been hired, and they had made trouble. It began with a dispute about religion, Tiennette being a Dissenter; then all sorts of faults were laid to her account. She went here or there, she did this or that, she conducted herself badly.

"A fellow who was discharged from the Moulinettes began coming to the house, and I think it was he who started the trouble. His name is Boiseriot."

"Ah!" said Madeleine. "He's a man that one must guard against!"

"Since he came to the village, my mistress has turned against me, and things have been going from bad to worse. When I'm left alone in the house, they lock up everything. Yesterday they missed a pair of scissors, and this morning, while I was out, they went through my things. Do you think I look like a thief? I told them what I thought and came away. Mother may go for my things if she wants to, but I'll never put my feet in their house again!"

Tiennette began to sob, but Madeleine comforted her.

"Don't take on so! There's no reason to get in such a state."

"Oh, you don't know!" sobbed the girl. "He will hear about it, and what will he think?"

"He? What he?"

"Why—why, Gideon. He is so far away, and I can't talk to him to defend

myself. They are capable of writing to him to defame me. They have already done it once; and he has just written to me that he's been sick and in the hospital."

Madeleine thought it her duty to say severely: "Why do you listen to that Protestant fellow?"

"Oh, are you against him, too?" cried Tiennette.

"No, I'm not against him; he's a boy I like very much."

"Well, you may as well know that it's for life. We are going to be married."

"A Dissenter with a Protestant? That is never seen."

"What has that to do with it? The minute he comes back to me, neither you nor mother nor Fridoline shall have anything to say. What does he care about these differences of religion—or I, either? When he has served his time I'll be ready. We have sworn it!"

Madeleine let her sister talk, for she could not help being impressed by the evident strength of her love for Gideon.

"Yes," continued Tiennette, "we took an oath. But now he is going to hear that they suspect me of stealing. Ah, Madeleine, I am in great trouble!"

Madeleine took her sister tenderly in her arms.

"Now, do be at peace and dry your tears. I know who spreads these lies. It is an old quarrel—you know nothing about it. I'm going to write to Gideon, and as soon as he knows that Boiseriot is back of these lies he will understand. I assure you that he will not doubt you for a single moment."

"Truly?"

"I swear it. You frighten yourself for nothing, Tiennette. Now be a sensible girl."

"This Boiseriot is a bad man," said Tiennette. "He doesn't like you any better than he does me."

"Why do you say that, sister?" asked Madeleine.

"The day before yesterday I heard him speaking to old Jules, the half-wit. He was telling him some news, and he had some about the Moulinettes; but of course you knew it before Boiseriot did."

Madeleine held Tiennette tightly.

"What news? I don't know any news."

"Truly? At Chantepie everybody was speaking of it."

"But what is it, what is it?"

White as death, Madeleine held her breath, fearing some evil. Tiennette did not notice it, and went on in a sarcastic tone:

"It is that that poor Michel Corbier is going to marry Violette, the dressmaker. They are to be married at the beginning of summer. He has just bought her an engagement ring."

Tiennette felt the hands of her sister slip off her shoulders. She turned. Madeleine had fainted, and lay stretched full length on the road.

XXXII

ALL at once, Madeleine made up her mind that Lalie should go to school. The idea came to her unexpectedly, like so many other strange ideas since she heard Tiennette's bad news.

It seemed to her that she had been wrong to let the child, who was nearly eight years old, go so long without teaching.

"To school, my dear! It is high time! I've taught you to read and to form your letters; now others must teach you what I am not wise enough to. To school, or you would reproach me afterward!"

Then, too, she was afraid of being criticised or ridiculed when the other woman took her place at the Moulinettes. She would not even wait for Easter, which was approaching. But she wanted the little girl to be dressed all new and beautifully; and as for taking the money from the family purse, that wasn't to be thought of.

No, she went to the savings-bank again and drew out all the remainder of her savings—a hundred francs. Then, before leaving the town, she made all her purchases, so that on the following Monday she could send the little one to school.

They set out early, Lalie trotting ahead. What a pretty dress, bought ready-made by a workwoman of the town! What a pretty painted basket! Madeleine was proud of the child. Her heart was very heavy—it was always so now—but one thought comforted her.

"Lalie will never forget me. Whatever happens, when she recalls her youth, she will say, 'It was Madeleine who took me by the hand to school my first morning!'"

When they reached St. Ambroise, Madeleine bought a cake and a pâté, and then some chocolates and pralines.

"Eat the bread and meat first," she told the child; "then the sweet things. Give

some of the candy to the other little girls, so that they will love you."

Madeleine knocked at the principal's door to present Lalie and give the necessary information.

The teacher appeared. She was a middle-aged woman in a one-piece black dress. She asked them in. Madeleine left her sabots at the door, but Lalie, stepping in with her new galoshes, almost fell, for the floor was polished like glass.

The woman wrote down what Madeleine said:

"The child's name is Eulalie Corbier—born at the Moulinettes on the 27th of November. Her mother is dead."

The teacher's voice said calmly:

"I know. I had the mother in my class. She was a good scholar, too."

"I believe it," replied Madeleine, "and this child will be clever, and will please you. Oh, *mademoiselle*, I pray you to take good care of her!"

The instructress looked surprised.

"We take good care of all our pupils," said she.

Madeleine blushed.

"I know you do," she stammered. "I have heard your school praised by everybody. But I meant that—that this little one is not like the others."

The teacher smiled gently—oh, very gently!

"You come a little too soon or too late," she said. "There are only three entry times—the first in October, the second in January, and the third at Easter. As this child is past seven, we will take her, although it is not in conformity to the rule."

Then she conducted Madeleine and Lalie to the door, saying:

"Excuse me, please, for I have some work to do now. Let the little girl play with the other children."

When the door was shut, Madeleine felt a change of heart.

"Lalie, would you like to come home with me?"

The child's heart was full; she did not answer.

"If you want to, my darling, say the word, and we will run away quickly. Come, let us go!"

She seized the child's hand and ran toward the gate; but as she got there the way was barred by some one who was coming in. It was a short, slender, pale-faced girl with smiling eyes.

"Good day," said she. "You have brought us a new scholar?"

Madeleine stopped, and stood inside the gate.

"I am the under mistress—she will be in my class," the newcomer added. Then she stooped down and kissed Lalie. "How are you, darling? Are you glad to come to school? I will give you a pretty book with pictures, and you shall see what good times we will have. What is your name?"

"Eulalie," said Madeleine.

"Eulalie, do you know how to play with dolls, or hide and seek? I will teach you to dance and sing. What a pretty dress you have, Eulalie! I wish I had one just like it. And this basket! Who gave you such a pretty basket?"

Lalie smiled, but kept her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Go on, do not be so foolish," said Madeleine. "Answer *mademoiselle*."

"Yes, answer me. I am not cross. Where did you get this pretty basket?"

"Nène gave it to me."

"Nène?"

"The children call me that," said Madeleine. "She has no mother; I brought her up—and her little brother, too."

The young teacher lifted the child, holding her to her breast; then, perceiving the scar on Lalie's cheek, she asked:

"What has happened to her?"

"She was burned," said Madeleine. "She had a terrible accident. See, her hair hasn't all grown out, and her poor little hands will never be cured."

The teacher's gentle eyes filled with tears. Madeleine, too, had to wipe away a tear-drop.

"It wasn't my fault, you must know, *mademoiselle*," she said quickly. "If they had listened to me, this misfortune wouldn't have happened. I have nothing to reproach myself with. I love the little one—I can't tell you how much I love her. One gets so much attached to children! I'm glad she's going to be in your class. Watch over her, won't you? Don't let her run too much. She will remember all that you teach her—she's clever, I assure you. She knows how to read and write—I taught her myself. I am not very good at arithmetic, or I would have taught her more. She will love you, *mademoiselle*; you won't have to punish her, believe me! Don't forget that the poor little thing has no mother—"

Five or six little girls ran round from the

court with big eyes and open ears. Madeleine broke off, crying.

The teacher kissed the poor little disfigured hands, and cried too.

"Have no fear," she said. "I will watch over her. I will love her as much as the others, and perhaps a little more."

Then she dried her eyes and went on:

"We won't cry any more. The children aren't used to it. They don't know what it means."

Turning to the court, she called:

"Jeanne! Elsie!"

Two little girls ran up to her.

"See, here's a new scholar; her name is Eulalie. Kiss her and take her hand. That's right! I'll carry the basket. We will go to look at the schoolroom, and then we'll play."

In a lower tone she said to Madeleine:

"You'd better go now. Don't be uneasy—she will be all right."

Madeleine started off alone. She went very quickly, almost running; then little by little her step lagged and she dragged her feet. At last she stopped. Had she said everything, given all the necessary advice? No, she had forgotten to tell them to put the child's hood on at recess; and if the little one grew weary, what would *mademoiselle* do? If she cried, would they send her home alone?

She went back to the school. The class had begun. She did not dare to go into the courtyard; she remained in the street near the wall, sitting on a stone.

The noises of the classes came to her ears confusedly, like a sort of murmur, a mingling of low voices. From another side the sounds were louder; sabots clacked, sweet little voices recited the alphabet, following the lead of an older and heavier voice, but still a gentle one. Then came shouts of laughter.

"They are happy, the little ones," thought Madeleine. "I hope they are not laughing at Lalie!"

A miller passed, and began to jest with her. Then, pushing a cart, came Bouju, who had once offered marriage to Madeleine. He stopped to wish her good day and to ask the news of her mother, Tien-nette, and all her family.

Madeleine's answers were short and quick. She felt impatient because she no longer heard the noises of the school. Bouju went on his way, and the school bell rang to dismiss the scholars. Madeleine ran to

the gate, but the under teacher saw her and said:

"Don't let her see you. The child is all right, and will soon feel entirely at home. She's quite happy. See, there she is, dancing with the others. Hide yourself, please!"

Madeleine got out of sight, and the teacher joined the little ones in their game.

"Lalie! Lalie! When you stop dancing, don't forget to put on your little cape!"

All the children turned in the direction of the voice. Who was this whose head could be seen above the top of the wall? The teacher shrugged her shoulders. Lalie smiled and blushed, but was the first to begin the game again.

"She doesn't feel strange," said Madeleine to herself. "I am glad of it. She doesn't miss me as much as I was afraid she would. See how she kisses the teacher! Well, so much the better. I'm glad of it—yes, I am!"

On the way back to the Moulinettes, she kept saying, "I'm glad!" But her eyes were full of tears.

When Lalie came from school, she talked a great deal.

"If you knew, Nène, what good times they have! The lady is teaching me to sing; she says I will be one of the best."

"You love her already?"

"Oh, yes! She is sweet! When you kiss her, her hair smells so nice! She gave me a paper rose."

"Like the one I bought for you at St. Ambroise?"

"Oh, much prettier!"

"I am glad," Madeleine thought, "that the teacher knew how to win the child."

As she was preparing supper, she saw the little one looking at herself in the mirror. Approaching silently, she saw Lalie trying to smile like her teacher.

Next day it was the same story.

"They haven't punished you?" asked Madeleine.

"Punished me? Why should they?"

"You don't get tired? Don't you often think of Joe and me?"

"Never," said Lalie.

Madeleine did not ask any more questions of that sort.

On Wednesday she tried to find an excuse for keeping Lalie out of school, but the child cried so bitterly that she was obliged to let her go.

Thus the week passed. All that Lalie thought or talked about was her school and her teacher. Madeleine suffered from a frantic jealousy which she was ashamed to show.

On the following Monday she had a brief moment of guilty joy. She had gone toward St. Ambroise, after four o'clock, to wait for Lalie. When the child came near, carrying her little basket, Madeleine saw that her eyes were red.

She sprang forward to meet Lalie, and took the little girl in her arms.

"What's the matter? You've been crying! Did she punish you?"

Lalie burst into sobs.

"She has whipped you! She has whipped you!"

"No, no!"

"Oh, the wicked woman! She whipped you!"

"No, no!"

"Then what did she do to you? Tell me! I will go back and scold her, the wicked creature, and you shall not go to her school again!"

Lalie slipped out of Madeleine's arms, and cried, in a rage:

"No, she is not wicked, and you shall not scold her! Who told you she had whipped me?"

"But you have been crying!"

"I cry because the children are naughty. They won't try to learn to read, and she said she would go away and we should never see her again!"

Madeleine, with her arms folded, stared at the child. Her heart was torn by jealousy.

Next day she declared that Lalie looked ill and had coughed in the night, and that she should not go to school. The child cried, but Madeleine was implacable and owed that she was the mistress.

XXXIII

"YOUR mother isn't very well; her pains have returned. She keeps saying that she wants to see you."

An old man from Coudray, passing the Moulinettes, delivered this message to Madeleine. She shook her head and said with impatience:

"What time have I, with all my work, and when I have to look after the children? My brother is with her, isn't he? My sisters, too, have almost all their Sundays free. Why can't they go to see her?"

"As the eldest," said the old man, "it's your duty to look after your mother."

Then he complained bitterly of the way the young treat their elders.

"Old people are always wrong," said he. "What right have they on the earth? So long as they can keep on working, they are tolerated; after that it is better to die right away."

Madeleine interrupted him.

"Tell mother that I will go to see her one of these days. Let her have patience, and take care of herself, so that when I go I'll find her cured."

The old man shook his head.

"How can she take care of herself? Where will she get the money to buy what she needs?"

Madeleine blushed.

"It's true, I'm a little behindhand. Oh, well, wait a moment—I'll give you some money to take to her."

She opened her bureau, muttering:

"After all, I am not rich!"

She emptied the purse in the drawer. Alas, there remained only twelve francs, exactly what she wanted to send her mother. She had drawn and drawn, and now this was the last of her money. What could she do? Fridoline must give a little more, and Tiennette must deprive herself of a ribbon. Madeleine could not spare any of this money. What if the children wanted something, and she had to refuse it just as she was about to leave them?

She fastened the purse, closed the drawer, and shut the bureau. Then she turned to the astonished old man.

"Mother will have to wait a little while. I will take some money to her myself. I want to tell her something."

"What does he want this time?"

The old man had gone, and Madeleine saw her brother coming. His face was very red, and his eyes were feverish. He came in heavily and sank into a chair.

"How are you, Madeleine?"

"How are you?" she answered dryly. "What do you want?"

He began to laugh.

"Oh, I guess you know!"

He cocked an eye and pretended to be counting money on the table.

"Money! You want money again? You come to the wrong place. I will give you nothing more!"

"It isn't a question of giving, but of

lending. You needn't hesitate, for am I not your brother?"

Madeleine shrugged her shoulders.

"Give you money, so that you can go to the tavern and get drunker than you are at this moment? Or so that you can carry it to that girl? Is that what you want money for?"

Cuirassier got to his feet in anger.

"What you say is unreasonable, and you are offensive. I'll never forget your words; they'll stand between us for life. You show by what you say that you haven't any heart, and have never known what it is to love anybody."

At once she turned on him.

"Hold your tongue and get out! I never loved anybody? Look out there, in the courtyard. See those children—they are the two beings that I love! They are worth all the rest—worth more than that creature you're so mad about—the girl who makes you a coward and a wretch. You make me laugh! I don't love anybody, hey? Do you see them out there, those little ones? I would let myself be cut in pieces for them. What does that mean to you? But look at them, you great fool, you!"

She put her two hands on his chest and pushed him toward the door.

"Look at them!" she repeated. "I want you to look at them. Aren't they as beautiful as your Violette? And they won't betray me as she has betrayed you! Ah, well, I am going to be turned out, and it is precisely she—your Violette—who is giving me this blow!"

"You lie!"

"I lie, do I? You poor fool, the wedding is going to be in three weeks!"

Cuirassier shrank back and covered his face with his hands. Groans came from his big chest.

"Oh, Madeleine, how unhappy I am!"

"And am I happy? Who thinks about that? Not you, for sure! All you think of is Violette. You would still wheedle my money from me for her, and she would be quite capable of accepting it. That money isn't mine—it belongs to those children you see out there. She's stolen enough from them, do you hear? I hate her, you don't know how I hate her! I had a little girl, the sweetest in the whole district, the sweetest in the world, and the cleverest—well, on account of Violette I have seen her almost burn to death, burn alive! And as if

that wasn't enough, she takes the child from me! She takes Lalie, she takes little Joe, she takes everything from me! Whatever I have taught them, she will turn it into a lie, she will change their religion, she will change their hearts, she will wipe from their memory my very name. Ah, damn her, how I hate her! And you who speak of her, I hate you, too! Get out! Get out!"

Cuirassier, recoiling, had reached the threshold. He didn't listen to her. In his eyes, red from intoxication, there burned a red flame.

He lifted his arm and held it out, doubling up his big fist and bringing it down several times like an enormous hammer.

"Unhappy man that I am! If another man gets her away from me, pray for him, for I'll beat him to a pulp!"

XXXIV

MICHEL CORBIER came back from Chan-
tepie, where he had gone to make the last arrangements. Everything was in order. He was to be baptized into the church on the Sunday before the wedding. The priest had consented to do this quietly and simply, without any show of rejoicing over Corbier's conversion. Michel was well satisfied. He talked of the preparations to Madeleine, who answered in a tone of polite indifference.

"What do you think of this, Joe?" said he, giving the child a paper of candies. "You, too, Lalie—see what she has sent you!"

Madeleine stopped her work, while Lalie drew near her father.

"Look at this box. Did you ever see such a pretty one?" He put on the table a small box covered with blue plush, and opened it with a little key. "See, it has everything necessary for sewing. There is a name written on it. You know how to read!"

The little girl spelled out:

"E-u-l-a-l-i-e—it's my name!"

The child held up the box for Madeleine to see. She took it and read the name. It was embroidered in fine letters on a little piece of linen, and it was not badly done.

Madeleine pinched her lips, and her eyes grew hard and dry. She closed the little box roughly, opened it, and shut it again—*crac, crac!* All at once her strong fingers had crushed the box, spilling its contents everywhere.

"Too bad!" said she. "I've broken it. It wasn't very strong. Oh, well, I will buy you another."

Then she took the two children by the hand and led them out of the house. She led them out to the pond and sat down under a great oak-tree, in the shade of its motionless leaves. There was peace everywhere. The children did not play; they sat by her side quietly and asked unexpected questions.

She felt like one who has to go upon a pilgrimage. Under that same tree, on an earlier day, she had sat when her heart was fresh and full of happiness. Now she was sick at heart, she had nothing to look forward to, she had come to the time of parting.

Within ten days Corbier would marry. She had only a week to remain at the Moulinettes. A week! And then she would go away, far from Lalie, far from Joe, to begin a new life. The thought was worse than death.

It must surely be a bad dream. She would wake up to suffer no more. She would find Lalie's head on her breast, and Joe, in his little bed beside her, would say with laughing eyes:

"You've been fast asleep, Nène!"

No, it couldn't be possible that she must go away. She would pray—the good God would not permit it. There would be something—He would do something to save her!

"Nène, where do the clouds go? What are they?"

"They are little sheep the good God sends out to His pasture."

Joe, lifting his hand, said:

"Nène, the moon isn't very far away, is it?"

"Nène," said Lalie, "are there people on the moon?"

"That's a little man you see there," replied Madeleine; "a very little man, and very old. He carries a load of fagots on his back to burn in his oven."

"Nène," demanded Joe, "what is behind the clouds?"

"That's the firmament," answered Lalie solemnly, "where the good God lives."

"Where is heaven, then, Nène?" asked Joe.

"My little one, nobody alive can see it, but good people who hate sin go there when they die."

"I don't see how they can go so high and not fall," said Joe.

Lalie pointed to the smooth surface of the pond, where the blue sky and the clouds were reflected.

"See," said she, "there's another firmament in the water."

"That's the world under this one," said Madeleine.

"And do people go there, too?"

"Yes, they do," said Madeleine.

Stories told by her foolish old aunt came to Madeleine's lips; but they would frighten children. She kept them back, and only told her own simple creed.

"There are three worlds," said she; "the world above, which is good; the world in the middle—that's our world, where there are good and bad; and the world underneath—that is a deadly place. Pray for us! These three worlds are not alike, and we only know our own. Things are not the same in the other two. Nobody can understand them; our eyes don't tell us, nor our ears."

She spoke softly, and her own trouble grew less poignant. Evening was falling, and a great pity seemed to descend from the sky.

"When we are dead, we go either above or below, according to our deserts. The people who go on high are those who have loved. They love us still. They watch over us."

"Do they see us?" demanded Lalie.

"Yes, they see us. Therefore, my little ones—"

She hesitated, not knowing how to say what was in her heart.

"For you there is help from above. Your mother is in heaven, looking down on you. She loves you. Nobody can love you as she does—nobody!"

The children opened their eyes wide, and were silent. Madeleine thought out loud, and her words were like a prayer.

"She watches over you, and she must know how I love you, too. Would that she could help me! If I must go away, I only ask that you will not forget me."

"But you are not going away, Nène," said Joe.

"Do you mean that you are going to die?" asked Lalie. "If you die, will you go up there, too?"

"I don't know."

"You'll have to go there, or else you won't be able to see us!"

Madeleine drew the two children to her breast.

"When I go away, perhaps I may never see you again. I am not your mother. No, I am—I am not your mother. Your mother is dead. She was good—oh, better than I! And she was beautiful—there never was anybody more beautiful. You must love her, little ones! You must love her better than me, better than anybody!"

She spoke in a low voice, slowly, in order that her words might leave an impression.

"You can love others, too. You may love me; it isn't forbidden. But your mother should come first. I will not be jealous. When you have grown up you can say, 'She was not our mother, but we remember her all the same.' That's all I ask."

Lalie was thoughtful and troubled.

"You are not our mother," she said, "nor our aunt, nor our cousin, and you talk of going away. Who, then, are you?"

"Who am I? Who am I?"

Joe rested his head on Madeleine's shoulder, astonished that she should ask such a question.

"Who is she?" he said. "Why, she's Nène!"

XXXV

EVERYTHING was ready. There was nothing more to do, nothing more to say. It was useless to weep, to pray, to discuss; all that was left was to go.

One night only remained—no more than seven or eight hours.

The wedding was set for Wednesday, but on Monday Violette's mother had come and installed part of her furniture. Madeleine did not wish to be there to receive the woman who was coming as a conqueror.

For the last time she had undressed the children. She had played with them as usual, in order not to make them feel unhappy. Then she put them both in her own bed.

For the last time she had let little Joe pinch her ears and pull down her hair.

Now Joe and Lalie were asleep, and there was not a sound in the farm-hands' room. The house was black, but it was still twilight outside.

Madeleine sat down by the open window. On a chair by her side lay a little package of linen, the only thing that she had in the Moulinettes, for her other belongings had already gone. Michel had paid to have them taken away in the morning.

It was the end!

She did not weep, she scarcely stirred. Her hair fell about her face, she felt no sensation in her legs and arms. All her life was concentrated in her breast, where her heart beat heavily.

The violets in the garden exhaled a sweet odor. A nightingale began to sing. Then, down in the pond, frogs began to croak, and presently from everywhere came their innumerable voices.

"I shall dwell no longer in this pretty place," Madeleine said to herself. "I am accustomed to it, and that makes it hard to go away. I shall regret the house, the pond, the brook where I did my washing. Where shall I find such a pleasant garden? I shall never see the lilac-bushes again, nor the climbing roses."

She tried to lessen her pain by thinking of these little things; but she knew it was not these that would bring her regret, but the two children, whose gentle breathing she heard.

"I was the mistress here. In this house everything went as I wished it. It won't be the same anywhere else. I shall be ordered about. No, I'll go and work in the fields with the men! Yes, I should like that better—to work hard, to sweat, to carry heavy loads."

"Good evening, Madeleine!"

A man drew near the window.

"Good evening!" he said again. "You don't recognize me? I suppose my uniform changes my looks."

She made a gesture as if waking up.

"Gideon!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, it's me. I'm on leave, and as I was passing on my way to take a train at Château Blanc I thought I would call here to see you."

"I'm glad to see you," said Madeleine. "Come in!"

He came to the window and leaned his arms on the sill.

"I can't stop—I'm too much in a hurry. Is the master at home?"

"He has not yet come back," said Madeleine. "This is a very eventful day for him," she added in a bitter tone. "He is being baptized, and there is rejoicing among the Catholics. You heard of it, didn't you?"

"Yes, I heard it talked of. The marriage is this week?"

"Wednesday."

"And you are leaving the Moulinettes? When do you go?"

"To-morrow."

Madeleine turned her head away, so that he might not see her expression; but he guessed it.

"You regret it, sister?" he said in a low voice.

"Yes," she replied.

Her voice was like that of the dying. Gideon stood by the window in silence, not knowing how to express his sympathy. Then, as silently, he grasped her hand.

"Are you going immediately?" she asked.

"I must. The train passes at a quarter past ten. I wish you good health and good courage, Madeleine. You know I always liked you, and I wish you happiness. We lived in the same house for four years, and I can't forget that. Besides, there is something, as you know, between your sister Tiennette and myself. I'm afraid I cannot comfort you. You would do better to weep, Madeleine!"

He kept shaking her hand, repeating: "Madeleine, my good Madeleine," until she reminded him of the hour.

A little shyly he said:

"Madeleine, I would like to kiss you before I go."

She leaned out and offered him her cheek.

"*Au revoir*, my brother!"

"Thank you, Madeleine, for the good letter you wrote about Tiennette. It did me good."

"Have you seen Tiennette?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, it was on account of her that I came. There was some one else I wanted to meet—an ugly wolf whose teeth I'd like to push down his throat. I didn't find him. So much the better for him!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"Boiseriot. I wanted to meet him alone, but when I saw him he was at a table in the café at St. Ambroise, with your brother."

"With my brother?"

"No wonder you're astonished. I was, too. There they sat side by side, drinking brandy. I sat down and waited to catch Boiseriot if he went out alone. I saw what was going on. Boiseriot was making him drink, while he emptied his own glass under the table. As I was going, I heard your brother call out:

"You say at ten o'clock, at the Belle-fontaine crossroads?"

"And he swore, he rolled his eyes, he hit the table. He must have drunk a lot to be in such a state."

"When he drinks he goes crazy," Madeleine whispered.

The clock in the house struck.

"Nine o'clock!" said Gideon. "I have just time enough to catch the train. Good-by, Madeleine!"

He disappeared in the thickening night.

Madeleine let him go without a word or gesture of farewell. She was in such deep sorrow that Gideon and Tiennette and Boiseriot and Cuirassier were alike indifferent to her. Her ideas, too, were not very clear. Gideon had said that Cuirassier was drunk, that Boiseriot made him drink—why?

"At ten o'clock, at the Bellefontaine crossroads!"

Poor brother! He, too, was in sore trouble, and when he was drunk—she suddenly remembered the wild look of his eyes.

"Ah, my God!"

Madeleine staggered up, then fell back into her chair. A memory cut across her brain like a steel sword. She saw again that menacing fist, and heard her brother's words:

"If another man gets her away from me, pray for him!"

Now she knew what he meant. Broken words flowed from her lips.

"At ten o'clock—at Bellefontaine! That's Michel's road! That's Michel's time!"

Then she rushed wildly out of the house, shouting:

"Gideon! Gideon!"

But her voice choked, and did not carry far. She ran across the garden and along the road that led to Château Blanc.

"Gideon! Gideon! Help!"

No answer came. She tossed her arms upward and cried:

"It is my fault! It is my fault! I have prayed for it. Oh, curses on me!"

Like a madwoman she ran across the fields toward Bellefontaine. She could not see the paths, but dashed blindly on. She came to a tall hedge, burst through it, and fell into a deep ditch.

She was utterly exhausted. She had to sit in the ditch and try to get her breath. A night bird passed with a hoarse cry. She got up, and drove away an evil thought.

"No, no!" she cried aloud. "Not at this price! I do not want them to be orphans. I have never wished it! I am lost! I am a murderess!"

She ran along the road, panting heavily.

"If I do not get there in time I shall be a murderess!"

Outlined in the fog she saw a large, dark object—a clump of tall trees beside the road leading to Bellefontaine. There were still three fields to cross. Now there was only one.

On she went, as if in a dream. At the meeting of the roads, where two oak-trees interlaced their branches, she saw something. Running there, she put her hands on the shoulders of a man crouching between the two trunks.

"Jean, what are you doing here?"

"Madeleine!"

"Yes, it is I. Come away at once!"

Her voice was the voice of command—sharp, threatening. In answer, he let out a terrible laugh—the hideous laugh of a madman.

"Jean, do you hear me? Walk on before me!"

"Why are you interfering in this? Go to bed. Honest girls don't run about the roads at night like this!"

He pushed her out from under the shadow of the trees, to a place where there was more light. Madeleine clung to her brother's arm.

"Come, Jean! Come along with me!"

But he shook her arm off and pushed her away.

"Clear out!" he said.

"Jean, why are you here?"

"It's for death. Get out!"

Madeleine darted at his arm, and tried to seize the knife that he was brandishing.

"What have you in your hand? Give it to me!"

She snatched at the knife, struck it down, and got her hand upon it. She struggled and cajoled, she commanded and suppliated, she shamed him and flattered him.

"Give it to me, Jean! You are drunk, you don't know what you're doing! Boiseriot got you drunk—he's a wretch! I came here to find you. You must go with me, you must believe me. Here, give me the weapon at once! What do you mean to do with it? Think, Jean! You are a fool, you are a coward! If you have a grievance, get vengeance in the daylight, like a man. I say you are a coward, a great coward!"

"It isn't a question of cowardice. It's death for us both—him first, then myself!"

"Give it to me—do you hear? You will, I know you will!"

Madeleine had managed to break the thin cord that attached the weapon to his arm. She threw it as far away as she could.

"Now, will you come with me?"

"I tell you it is for death! I don't need a knife, for I can kill him with my hands. Get away!"

"Jean, you will ruin yourself and me too. You don't know! Those two poor little ones, they sleep so tranquilly. Come and see them. What have those innocent children done to you?"

"Don't talk! There's nothing to say. Get out of my way!"

Madeleine fell on her knees, clasped her hands, and lied—lied desperately.

"Listen! I did not want to tell you. I love him! Yes, I love him! I didn't want to tell you, for I was ashamed. Now that you know it you cannot wish to do me this wrong. It will kill me, don't you see? You do not want to kill me, Jean, my brother! Come, come, let us go! I will prevent the marriage—I can, and you will see that even now he will give her up for me. I say you shall not touch him! I will defend him! I will confess what he has been to me as soon as he comes, and shame will fall on me, on you, on all the family!"

As she pleaded, she held him by the shoulders.

"Take yourself out of my way!" he cried, and threw her from him.

Madeleine leaped on her brother and dragged him to his knees. He raised himself, and struck her with his heavy fist. She fell to the ground, striking her head against a tree.

She lay on her back; the sky seemed to reel above her, the stars danced wildly, and then she knew nothing more.

When she came to herself, she saw a head near her face, and under her shoulders, supporting her, was a trembling arm. Cuirassier was on his knees, completely sobered. He sobbed and pleaded with her.

"Madeleine, try to get up! My sister, forgive me! Madeleine, tell me you are not hurt!"

Madeleine looked at him in astonishment. Suddenly memory returned. She uttered a cry, and, seizing her brother's arms, gazed at him. He understood, and said in a shamefaced way:

"Fear nothing—he has gone by. By this time he is at the Moulinettes. My

madness has passed. Madeleine, tell me you are not hurt!"

Madeleine, rising painfully to her feet, had the courage to smile.

"No, I am not hurt," she said. "It was a sudden weakness. Help me to get up."

"Shall I carry you?" he asked.

"Jean, when you were a little fellow, do you remember that I used to lead you along the roads? I wasn't much bigger than you, but I knew the way better. To-day you are lost, and I have to put you in the right way again."

"My sister, lead me," he said in a gentle voice.

"Jean, you must go away from here for a time. Go at once—yes, to-night. Walk all night, and if you are not far enough when morning comes, keep on walking. You said that in a town you could easily find work. Look for it, then. Here is money for you—take it. When you are able, you can return it. Jean, dear, don't you think I am right?"

"I will do what you say, my sister."

She took him by the hand, and together they came out from the shadow of the trees. On the wide road they threw their arms about each other.

"Go!" she said.

Rapidly he walked away.

XXXVI

It was nearly midnight when Madeleine got back to the Moulinettes. The door was unbarred, as she had left it, for Michel had gone in by the back way, as was his wont. She went in on tiptoe, and, hastily throwing off her clothes, slipped into bed.

The two children lay close together in the middle of the bed. She separated them, and lay down between them, passing her arms around their soft little bodies. Then she lay there still, her eyes wide open, thinking.

An enormous weight pressed upon her breast. She was stifling. She withdrew her arms, and the little ones moved. With infinite precaution she drew them to her and held their heads against her breast.

One o'clock struck. Madeleine felt a cold wind on her forehead; her hair rose on her head. She could not weep; she could just breathe, no more. Her head fell back, her mouth opened, and a dismal groan sounded through the room.

Michel Corbier heard it in the adjoining chamber.

"Madeleine, are you sick?" he called out.

She made no answer. Hearing nothing, Michel went back to sleep.

The children were uncomfortable and restless. She arranged them in an easier position.

"There, there, my little ones!"

She held them closer, fondling their little limbs. Her hands kept caressing them.

The night rolled by, the faint light came through the windows, a cock in the farmyard saluted the day.

"Oh, my babes, my babes, good-by!"

She trembled so much that she feared she would awaken them; but she succeeded in mastering it. She hugged them still more closely, caressing them with her hands.

"Good-by!" she said again.

Then she crept out of bed without awakening them. She lit a candle, and hastily dressed herself. A terrible trembling shook her, and her teeth chattered. Her hands worked away, fastening her skirt and buttoning her bodice; but her eyes, large and staring, never left the children. It was her eyes, now, that touched the little curly heads, caressed them, blessed them.

She blew out the candle, and started to go away; but when she had taken three steps she ran back and fell on her knees by the bed.

"Oh, oh!" she said.

She touched them again, she pressed her lips on the warm flesh. Then she tried to rise, but the little boy, half awake, had thrown his arm up and clutched her hair with his hand. Madeleine gently released it. Running to the door, she fled across the garden with her apron pressed against her mouth to drown her sobs.

XXXVII

It was morning. In a humble cottage two poor women in sad need looked at each other. One was preparing the soup; the other, her daughter, was packing her working clothes.

"Well, good-by, mother."

"You haven't eaten anything, and you have more than a league to go. Try and eat your soup."

"No, I don't want anything."

"Are you sick, Madeleine?"

"I only wish I was sick! I only wish I was dead!"

The old woman wrung her hands—washerwoman's hands, knotted and blue.

"I don't like to hear you speak like that, Madeleine. Don't invite evil, but face it if it comes. Weep—that will relieve you. For two weeks you have been in this terrible fit of depression. Is that good sense? Is it wise to get into such a state because you left your place? At thirty years old, and handsome, tall, and strong, like you! If your sisters were to see you, what would they say? Come, drink this coffee, with a little nip in it—that's right. Go on, now; work well and satisfy your new master!"

Madeleine took her bundle and went.

Two hundred steps away she stopped. The day was already warm. Her bundle was too big and carelessly tied, and it hampered her badly. She sat down to make it over; but as she unfolded its contents her pain returned to her, as bitter as ever. There were so many things in the bundle to make her remember! It was with this camisole that she used to wrap little Joe's cold feet, down at Corbier's, where they no longer needed a servant. This scorched apron was the one with which she had tried to put out the fire that was burning Lalie on that awful day.

She was completely absorbed in her memories. She remembered the day when she first went to the house of the disconsolate young widower. She had loved him with a quiet and more or less maternal affection; but the two children had at once taken the first place in her heart. From that hour up to now they had filled it.

They had given her so many joys, they had given her so many pains! She recalled their Sunday walks, the games they had played beside the pond. She endured over again her anguished vigils by the crib of Lalie. This recollection remained in her heart like a deep wound; she could still hear the child's groans:

"Nène, Nène! I am hurt, Nène!"

Two weeks had passed since she saw the children last, when she had unwound the little arms that they had thrown around her neck in their sleep. She could hear their astonished cry that first morning:

"Nène! Nène! Where are you, Nène?"

Now she had taken a new situation, and must stop thinking about them.

Not caring to let people see that she had been weeping, she left the main road and took a path that passed by the Moulinettes. Her heart leaped at the thought that perhaps she would catch a glimpse of Lalie and Joe.

As she crossed a field, a man who was working there cried:

"Good day, Madeleine!"

She raised her head. It was Corbier, looking happy and contented.

"Good day," she replied. "You're working?"

"Yes—plowing for the winter wheat. I have a new plow. The old one was too heavy, and I bought a better kind. Come and look at it!"

He did not notice her poor, sorrowful face.

"Are the children well?" she said.

"All well, thank you. At first they kept asking for you, but now they don't think about it. Violette has won them over."

As she turned her head, he saw how sad she looked.

"You know, Madeleine," he said in a kind tone, "for four years you gave us good service and real friendship. Whenever you care to come and see us at the Moulinettes, you will always be welcome. I hope you may always live in health and happiness, Madeleine!"

"The same to you, and thank you, Corbier."

She went on her way, sobbing.

Yes, she would go back to the Moulinettes—she would go there now, since she was so near. Violette had won the children over, Corbier said. How? With candy, perhaps. She had no other way; she couldn't give them love, for she had no heart, as Madeleine knew well.

The little darlings! Never would they forget her. Was she not their real mother? Do children forget their mother in two weeks?

Almost running, she turned into the familiar lane and approached the house. The door stood open, and she went in.

"Good morning, Violette!"

"Good morning. What do you want? Did you forget something?"

"No. I was just passing. I met Corbier, and he invited me to call at any time. Does it suit your convenience, Violette?"

"Unfortunately it doesn't at all suit my convenience. If I am mistress here, it isn't your doing, is it? Your place isn't in my house, any more than it is in the fields where my husband works."

"Oh, Violette, don't be revengeful! For this once I should like to see the children!"

Violette smiled cruelly.

"So be it! But you are going to be disappointed. Here is Lalie now."

The little girl came in, running through the hall.

Tossed up in the air and mothered with kisses, again and again and again, on the eyes, on the forehead, on the scarred cheek, on the poor little deformed fingers. Won over? You wicked woman, do you call this winning them over?

The child permitted herself to be kissed.

"You have your pretty collar still, my little one?"

"Mama has given me one all of gold, much prettier than the one you gave me."

"Don't you love me any more, Lalie?"

The child hesitated.

"Yes, Madeleine."

"You used to call me Nène!"

"Oh, I can say Madeleine very well now."

The poor heart sank. Violette kept her wicked smile and showed her fine white teeth.

"Where is little Joe?"

"In his bed on the other side of the hall."

You know the way."

Madeleine ran thither.

"Joe! My little Joe!"

Madeleine's strong hands closed around the little naked body; but the child did not put out his arms to her as formerly. He was displeased, and spoke in a cross tone.

"I am not little Joe any more! I am a big boy!"

"Oh, my God!"

"I do not love you any more. Go away! You smell of nasty cheese!"

With a sob, profound and hoarse, Madeleine turned and fled.

At the end of the garden she ran against a wall. She did not stop, though her package fell to the ground, and she lost her sabots. She ran straight to the pond, to a spot where the water was black and deep. She ran, she ran, and threw herself in.

She rose to the surface once, with her lungs full of water. Around her a thousand little voices sounded, mocking her:

"Nène! Nène! Nène!"

She lost consciousness, and sank down into the muddy depths. A few bubbles rose to the surface, then the water was still again.

Light clouds like white sheep slowly sailed across the sky. The sun shone aloft, the day was serene and dazzling.

THE END

Parlor Magic

BERNARDO THE GREAT ONCE MORE DEMONSTRATES HIS
MARVELOUS POWERS

By Robert Terry Shannon

BERNARDO the Great was eavesdropping. It had come about accidentally, and he was entirely shameless in the matter.

Down the center of the waiting-room ran a railway-station bench—high-backed, with seats on either side, marvelously uncomfortable. On one side sat Clyde Berryhill, his youthful voice aching with love, bidding farewell to Milly Archer, slender, slightly golden in tone, a ripening peach, even to the suggestion of lingering greenness. On the other side of the seat, meditating morosely upon the vicissitudes of the itinerant showman, sat Bernardo, miracle-monger extraordinary to the Mississippi Valley.

"Milly, stop! Stop and think about the chances you're taking!"

The girl's reply had a stubborn ring.

"I've thought. I'll die of the pip if I have to stay here any longer!"

"The city's no place for you. Besides, Harmonville's all right. Look at my two flivvers! Maybe I'll have my own garage business next winter, and—"

"I got to live my own life, Clyde, in the city."

"Your own life!" He could not restrain a bitter tone. "You're following Jerry Pickett!"

"That 'll do!" Milly flared. "He's just a friend, and you know it!"

"A slick-haired sport! A drummer for women's hats! If you had a father or mother—"

The deep, magnetic eyes of the showman flamed, and one long leg swung nervously across the other. He knew the symptoms. Half the time he was a mountebank; during the remainder he was forever getting involved in other people's affairs. This was one of those occasions. More even than Clyde Berryhill, he yearned to put

not only a crimp but a permanent wave in the glossy hair of the predatory salesman.

Outside sounded the whistle of the approaching train; the scuffle of feet on the platform; the trundling noise of a baggage-truck. The girl rose to her feet, lifting a canvas valise. The boy slumped in his seat. For a moment her hand rested on his shoulder, and a tear meandered unseen down her cheek before she turned with a resolute effort and went out alone.

Bernardo, with his worn bags, followed in stately dignity, a senatorial figure in his Prince Albert and wide black hat.

His somber gaze rested mystically upon the trim, sartorial splendor of Mr. Jerry Pickett, who flashed a gold tooth in smiling upon Milly. Pickett wore a purple necktie, studded with an opal pin, and spats.

Bernardo's eyes sought an antidote. He found it in the squat bulk of Judge Ezra K. Blackburn, of Euphalia, forty miles down the line.

The judge discovered his old friend at the same instant.

"Bernardo!" He puffed forward, his smooth pink face a flushed moon of pleasure. "Well! Well! Going down toward Euphalia?"

It was the habit of the judge to visit, monthly, a large farm he owned near Harmonville. The luck of discovering so entertaining a seat-mate as Bernardo for the homeward journey suffused him with social amity. When he learned that the showman was to play Euphalia the next night but one, he forthwith insisted upon the visitor being his guest. This occurred on a Sunday, and Bernardo, consequently, had more than a day of leisure.

"You got to come out to the house and rest your tired bones," Judge Blackburn beamed, as they sat down together in the

car. "Eunice 'll be plumb tickled to death!"

Bernardo, were his mind not grappling with the problem of Milly and Jerry Pickett, would have been delighted to accept. For ten years he had played Euphalia annually. His friendship with the judge dated back to the time when Ezra was mayor, and had granted Bernardo the local license to hold a performance. Eunice Blackburn, the only daughter of her widowed father, now a young woman of twenty, had an affectionate reverence for the charlatan which extended back to her pigtail days, when Bernardo had pulled white rabbits out of her father's hat, privately, for her own marveling eyes.

Half-way up the car ahead of them, Bernardo saw Jerry Pickett arranging the girl in her seat with exaggerated gallantry. His mind turned to the story of the hawk and the chick—a figure which he qualified with the reflection that the hawk had the doubtful merit of frankness in his purpose.

His lips tightened. Suddenly, a swirl of anger enveloped him, fusing his antipathies, his sympathies, and his desires together in one lurid moment of inspiration. Immediately he grew calm.

"Judge, you just mentioned Eunice," he remarked in a speculative tone. "Suppose you saw another girl of about her age and general description headed straight for the damnation how-wows—"

Blackburn blinked.

"How's that?"

"Would you pitch in—with me—to head her off?"

"Is this a hypothetical case, or what?"

"It's an actual one—here and now. Are you on?"

Judge Blackburn smiled as only a man of obese prosperity can; yet there was something steady and straight in the depths of his round blue eyes.

"The court," he announced, dropping whimsically into legal vernacular, "is disposed to entertain the motion. You may let it show in the record."

Bernardo cleared his throat and replied with the solemnity of a barrister.

"For the first time in the 'Chronicles of Bernardo the Great' let it be written that he is about to corrupt the judiciary and inveigle the bench into a nefarious combination of trickery, jugglery, and fraud. If you will lean closer with your depraved ear, sir, I will proceed with the pollution."

The judge nodded brightly.

"Now you're talking like your old self. Fire away!"

Dropping their voices to monotones, the two men, so different, yet so alike at base, became submerged in the darkest of plots. At length, having apparently finished, they rose and made their way to the front of the car. Fortunately, the seat behind Milly and the drummer was unoccupied.

"Those open windows back there are mighty bad for my sore throat," Judge Blackburn boomed. "Just my luck, too, to have everything in kingdom come pile up on me at once!"

Bernardo dropped into the seat beside him, content, for once, to forego the spotlight. Later on, he would have his big scene.

"So you take over the Busy Bee tomorrow, do you, judge? That's a pretty big department-store for a town the size of Euphalia, isn't it?"

Bernardo, too, had a strange loudness in his voice.

"Big! I intend to make it gigantic!"

"You don't tell me!"

"I sure do. What our town needs is a regular, live-wire emporium where the farmers and their wives can get everything they need without running up to the city all the time."

A quirk of the head—a slight, sidewise turning—betrayed the listening ears of Jerry Pickett.

"But you're not a merchant; you're a judge," Bernardo protested.

"I'll learn," Blackburn announced as glibly as any confidence man between coasts. "I'll put so much ginger into that place that I'll get all the business in town. For instance, I'm going to install a mammoth millinery department. I do things on a big scale!"

The news seemed to stir Pickett deeply. With a glance over his shoulder, he struggled to get a view of the men who were discussing a subject so dear to his heart. Peccadillos, with him, were a side line when there was a whiff of real business in the air.

Bernardo scoffed heatedly..

"What do you know about women's hats?"

"I'm going to find out about 'em," Judge Blackburn roared. "I'm going to get in connection with a first-class millinery house—"

It was not in the soul of Jerry Pickett to let a golden opportunity knock twice. Milly, for the moment, ceased to exist. He sprang from his seat and confronted his man. He flashed his golden smile and his card simultaneously.

"My card!" He presented it gracefully, between his first and second finger. "I don't like to butt in, but business is business. My house handles exactly the line of stuff you need. In hats we're supreme!"

Judge Blackburn passed the card to Bernardo.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Pickett," he remarked. "I want you to know my friend, Mr. Bernardo."

Bernardo seized the proffered hand with a warmth that seemed to promise a lifelong friendship.

"The chance of a lifetime!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Pickett here, judge, can steer you past many a dangerous millinery reef, straight out into the deep blue sea of prosperity."

"I've heard of your firm," the judge said cordially.

"Sure you have! We're the biggest house in the Southwest. Take a new man like you, now, he's apt to make mistakes in handling shoddy stuff. Don't do it—don't do it!" He leaned confidentially on the seat beside the others. "Get the best. Shoot the new stuff at 'em. You can stand the town on its head!"

Bernardo nodded.

"Spoken like a man!" he murmured.

"You bet your life it is," Pickett agreed.

"When you handle the right stuff in millinery the turnover is simply enormous—enormous!"

Judge Blackburn lifted a trusting countenance to the expert.

"I'd like to talk it over with you," he said in the voice of a man asking a favor. "I wonder if by any good luck you might be stopping off in Euphalia?"

Jerry Pickett would have stopped off in the center of the Sahara.

"Delighted! Always glad to be of service. It's my policy—whether you give me an order or not. I'll have 'em put my trunks off, and I'll show you some samples that 'll make your eyes stick out!"

The judge smiled.

"Say, we'll get into town about five o'clock. Suppose you come up to the house for dinner and bring your samples?"

"Tickled to death—tickled to—"

A shadow crossed Pickett's face for a flickering instant. His voice trailed into silence.

"Wait a minute, judge," Bernardo gently suggested. "Mr. Pickett has a young lady with him."

Hospitality oozed from the judge. It cloyed his speech and brightened his beaming smile.

"Bring her along!" he cried. "My daughter 'll take care of her. We'll have a good old home-cooked dinner, and you and I, Mr. Pickett, will talk hats. How about it, eh?"

Mr. Pickett's smile was almost paternal.

"The young lady is going up to the city to take a position with our firm, and in a way I feel responsible for her."

Like many a better man who forgot the old adage about the mixing of business and pleasure, the traveling salesman unwittingly sipped the brew of trouble.

"Of course you'll have to bring her along," the judge declared. "To-morrow's Sunday, so there's no hurry about getting in to the city. Mr. Bernardo's coming up to the house for dinner, anyway."

II

AND so, although he had not the faintest knowledge of it, the forces of chance and even of destiny, perhaps, intervened in the suave plans of the gold-toothed tempter. When the train pulled in at Euphalia, the four alighted in close harmony, Milly clinging to the broadcloth arm of Bernardo. Pickett and the judge babbled to each other of chiffons, laces, feathers, frames, and beaded trimmings.

So far, good. Flight had been arrested; yet balanced against that advantage was the distressing fact that Milly, seeing such respect accorded to the gorgeous Pickett, was plainly impressed with his cleverness and importance.

Eunice Blackburn met them in the judge's car—a laughing-eyed girl who echoed her father's hospitality.

"Mighty glad to have you all come," she smiled, slipping a friendly arm around Milly's waist. Chucking her father under the chin, she led the way to the machine. "They have your pictures posted all over town, Mr. Bernardo. Jiminy, I bet folks 'll be jealous when they find out we've been entertaining such a celebrity!"

Pickett's baggage was on the platform. The judge urged him not to bother with it

—to-morrow would do to look at the samples. He insisted that the salesman should stay overnight, and Eunice was delighted to have Milly.

"We'll sleep together and tell ghost stories," she told Milly gaily.

Pickett started up from his seat in the car.

"Ghost stories!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Why, yes," Eunice smiled back from the front seat. "Don't you love them?"

The salesman shuddered.

"Funny thing about that," he told the judge. "Ghost stories always give me a chill up my spine—like some people are affected by a snake or a cat." Then he smiled guiltily. "Everybody's got their pet peculiarities, I guess. Now about these fall models, judge—"

Bernardo turned his face away to hide a smile. They were driving slowly down the main street, past a new library, into a shaded side street of snug cottages. The conviction came to Bernardo that life—domestic life—amid such conveniences was capable of infinite profit; that a new era of satisfaction had come to its inhabitants.

No one knew better than he the emptiness of the city's promises, the heart-breaking, grinding struggle for existence that it imposes on all but the strong. Here the average folk, the Millies and the Clydes, had their chance. It was not a place to be despised.

For an instant he had a curious thought of life as a golden coin with happiness on one side and sorrow on the other, spinning, for the moment, in mid air. Perhaps, with his sleight of hand, he could flick its edge and give it the proper flip.

The car turned into a graveled drive, between elms, to the cool, white home of Judge Blackburn—a wide-porched structure, generous in its rambling extent.

"Dinner at half past six," Eunice announced, as they alighted. "I'm going to make the biscuits myself to-night, and don't anybody dare to be late!"

Milly timidly slipped her hand into the other girl's.

"Let me help you," she said. "I'd like to learn how."

"All right! I just love to cook—don't you?"

The three men were left together. Bernardo at once made the excuse that he would stroll down-town for an hour; that he must have a business chat with the man-

ager of the opera-house. The judge was moved to protest, but Pickett spoke first.

"Great!" he smiled. "That'll give me time to outline some rattling good ideas before we eat."

He inserted his hand under the judge's arm and led him toward a group of wicker chairs on the porch.

"Willow plumes," Bernardo heard the salesman say, "is nix!"

With a heart hardened by the exigencies of the situation, he ignored the appeal for moral assistance that was written on the face of the jurist and made his way, humming softly to himself, back to the business section of Euphalia.

When he returned, Pickett was still in action. He had his face up close to the judge and was pounding one palm with an energetic fist. He slapped his victim on the shoulder for emphasis; he referred to a leather note-book for price quotations. Smashing, undeniable argument raged in the air.

Bernardo sauntered toward the front door. He heartlessly ignored the judge's secret, pleading looks for help.

"I won't interrupt you gentlemen while you're talking business," he said.

Eunice appeared at the door.

"Dinner ready in a few minutes," she warned.

Bernardo stepped inside.

"Thine ear," he said to her mysteriously. "Thine ear, child of a noble sire—privately, for a few moments."

Eunice laughed and led him into the parlor. At first, as he spoke, she paled slightly; then she reddened. At the last, with a smile that was reminiscent of her father, she thrust out her hand and they shook.

Before they were seated at table the judge had an opportunity to whisper to Bernardo.

"Call him off," he threatened, "or I'll kill him! He's a hat fiend! He's talking me to death!"

It was Eunice who, early in the meal, checked the flow of hat lore and turned the topic to the magic art of Bernardo. He resisted her gently, told a little, answered a question, and, by degrees, waxed into the subject that he knew best. He talked fluently, and with apparent authority, upon hypnotism, telepathy, thought force, and psychic phenomena.

"On the stage, of course, it is all trickery," he explained. "Don't repeat that,

please—but the real thing, the miracle of the mind, does not lend itself to public demonstration.”

Pickett, intent upon being agreeable, asked innocently if it was all trickery off the stage.

“There are influences,” the showman replied softly, with a kind of vibrant magnetism, “that we of the illuminati, ourselves, dare not question. It has been my life work to study—yes, to fathom—mysteries that pass understanding. Believe me, please, I have acquired the ability after many years to perform feats that transcend all seeming natural laws.”

The hat man laughed nervously.

“Sounds spooky,” he remarked.

“The supernatural is very close to us,” the faker continued solemnly. “When conditions are right, the demonstrations are sometimes startling.”

“Could you—could you show us anything to-night?” inquired Eunice, her face alight with interest.

“Unless my subliminal self deceives me, I can. There is some one among us who has strong psychic powers—a potential medium of great possibilities. I imagine it is this little lady here,” Bernardo concluded, bowing gravely to Milly.

Warmed by the good cheer of Eunice and the friendly atmosphere of the Blackburn home, the girl was almost vivacious.

“Oh, I’d love to try!” she cried.

“You shall,” Bernardo promised. “It would be folly to miss the opportunity.”

The judge followed the lead blindly, glad of anything that would silence Pickett on the subject of hats.

“I’m anxious to see some of that stuff,” he urged.

“It is possible,” Bernardo informed them, “to accomplish almost anything with pure thought force. For instance, I have seen in a darkened room the faint, luminous outlines of a human face, produced by several persons concentrating on the thought of some absent friend. All of this, my friends, is within the range of scientific possibility.”

“Wonderful!” Eunice bubbled.

“It ought to be some person who is closely related to one of us,” the wizard continued. “Mr. Pickett’s wife, let us say.”

“Why—why—my wife is—that is, I’m single,” stammered Mr. Pickett, flushing painfully.

Bernardo gazed at him with slightly up-raised brows, hesitating a minute before speaking.

“Yes?”

“Why, yes.”

“Well—it doesn’t matter. We’ll try, anyway.”

III

THE meal was finished. While they were waiting for the twilight to fade, Eunice sat at the piano and fingered the keys softly. Her father asked her to sing. She complied readily with a few old-time songs in a low, tender voice. Bernardo judged they must have been songs that Milly had heard in childhood, for he saw, or thought he saw, the trace of a tear on her cheek.

When it was sufficiently dark outside, Eunice drew the shades of the living-room and demanded that Bernardo make ready for an experiment.

Between the living-room and the dining-room was an aperture the width of double doors, hung with portières. Bernardo requested that both rooms be darkened and that the portières be drawn. The door into the entrance hall was closed. They sat together in the living-room, in darkness.

“I shall not attempt to explain the subtle principle of it all,” he said softly, as they settled in their chairs. “I only assert that certain strange demonstrations can be made by thought force. Now, let us all concentrate on some definite object. Some absent person—Mr. Pickett’s wife—”

A voice that seemed tinged with annoyance spoke up.

“But I told you I haven’t a wife!”

“It doesn’t matter. We’ll concentrate on the woman who should be your wife, if you did have a wife.”

“Why pick on me?” There was a suggestion of a forced laugh in Pickett’s tone. “Let’s call this stunt off—what say?”

“I have a feeling,” Bernardo whispered huskily, “that you have a close personal affinity with some lady. Perhaps it is merely an impression. If I am wrong, ethereal forces will correct me. In any case we shall try, and, failing, perchance we shall pass confidently on to one of the others present. Let us have silence, perfect silence, for four or five minutes. Let everybody think boldly, with all his mental energy, upon Mr. Pickett’s mental affinity. *Begin!*”

A silence as deep as the darkness that surrounded them fell upon the little group.

Gradually, as they became accustomed to the stillness, it was possible to locate each person's position by the barely audible sound of his or her breath. Even the ticking of Bernardo's heavy watch reached their ears. Eyes strained into the darkness as the minutes passed. Then—

It was incredible! It was spine-freezing! Before their eyes something took form with a pale, dim light—a face! As they watched it seemed to grow a shade more distinct, revealing unmistakably feminine features. Softly the thinnest of whispers floated out in a single word:

"Jerry!"

The face vanished. Pickett bounded out of his chair, struck a match, made his way to the wall switch, and pushed the button. Tiny points of perspiration glistened on his forehead; his cheeks showed pasty white.

"I can't stand this!" he cried in a piping voice from which all self-assurance had fled. "It's devil's work!"

He dropped, shaking, into a chair.

Bernardo shot a quick glance toward Milly. His great eyes, glittering with keen, worldly wisdom, began to see what only the one man in a thousand can detect—the beginning of the end of a spell.

The girl was looking at Pickett quietly. The man's blue lips formed some faltering words. In the midst of them, Milly turned her face in another direction.

"The most remarkable thing I ever witnessed in my life!" Judge Blackburn gasped. "It wasn't a trick, was it?"

"How could it have been?" Eunice asked indignantly.

"She—she called my name!" Pickett quavered.

"It is the hour and the place," Bernardo stated. "This time we'll leave all the lights on, for Mr. Pickett's benefit. Now, Miss Milly, let us all think of a friend of yours. Think of some one back in Harmonville—some one you know extremely well—a boy sweetheart, let us say. Think of some one who was very close to you, very fond of you. There is such a person?"

Milly hesitated just a moment, her eyes cast down.

"Yes," she said, suddenly lifting her face. "There is somebody!"

Bernardo smiled a world-weary, tolerant smile.

"Splendid!" he said. "This time we concentrate and send a telepathic suggestion. We suggest that he should go to the

telephone forty miles away and call up Euphalia here, long-distance. He'll ask the local operator for the residence of Judge Blackburn—a name he probably never heard before. It is now three minutes of nine. Let us think, all together, on this one subject. Let the suggestion fly, as swift and strong as lightning, through the invisible ether. If these two hearts beat in tune, if the rhythmic vibration of nature still operates in the boundless universe, we shall have the answer. By nine o'clock the fates shall speak. *Begin!*"

Pickett, sickened, stared straight ahead. Bernardo, with his head drooped forward, saw the judge eying him keenly. Forgetting to concentrate for a moment, he favored his host with a wink. The girls sat with their hands shading their eyes.

A clock in the hall struck the hour, and then, shrill above it, like a cry out of nowhere, came the jangle of the telephone-bell in an outer room.

"Do you believe, Milly?" asked Bernardo majestically.

The girl got up, strange and eager about the eyes.

"I believe!" she affirmed steadily.

"Then answer your lover's voice!" he commanded impressively.

Eunice swung open the door that led to the hall; Milly moved out of the room. They heard her click the receiver from the hook; they heard the quavering "Hello!" They felt the instant surge of joy tingling high, like a lark's madrigal. They heard an incoherent blending of words that trilled on the scale of the great happiness.

Eunice passed out of the room, and as she drew the door shut she announced with a prim little smile that she was going out on the porch to look at the moon.

The three men alone in the parlor sat for a time without speaking. Bernardo, apparently relaxing from a strain, suffered his lids to drop over his eyes. Judge Blackburn, frankly mystified, scratched his head reflectively and waited. Pickett, because he felt that they were waiting for him, tried weakly to smile.

"I wonder how long she's going to keep on talking to that hick!" he asked with an effort at lightness.

It was Bernardo who answered him.

"All the rest of her life, my friend—from now on."

"The back door is open," added the judge, "and I advise you, Mr. Pickett, to

use that exit. Otherwise, I shall inevitably forget that you are my guest and bust you one on the nose!"

IV

JUDGE BLACKBURN immediately began to piece the story together with judicial thoroughness.

"So far I follow you, Bernardo. You took Eunice into your confidence, and she slipped across the street and got her girl chum to come over and mark up her face with wet matches. Then the chum slipped in the back way, took off her shoes, and stuck her face through the portières at the right time. Yes, I get that; but how about the telephone-call?"

Bernardo slowly lighted the cigar the judge had given him. It was a good cigar, and he waited a full moment to enjoy its fragrance before answering.

"Why, merchant prince, I'll tell you about that. When I walked down-town this afternoon, I telephoned back to Harmonville and got Clyde, the budding young garage-owner, on the wire. That was enough. I told him to come to Euphalia—a two hours' trip in his flivver—and phone your house at nine o'clock, sharp. I told him that Milly would be waiting. He's down at the drug-store now, and if they are ever able to tear themselves away from the telephone, he'll be right up here to take her home!"

The Facts About Cynthia

A SMALL-TOWN GIRL'S ADVENTURES AS AN ART STUDENT
IN NEW YORK

By Robert L. Duffus

CYNTHIA might never have discovered that she was artistic if, in the nick of time, her uncle had not died. Uncle Ernest was an old sweetheart of hers, but the romance had terminated when she was five and Uncle Ernest forty-two, and since then he had been not so much a personality as a birthday or Christmas letter. The letter always contained a check, but it contained less and less evidence of a human being, and it seemed, on the whole, a better arrangement that Uncle Ernest should seek quarters where no board or rent was to be paid—that is to say, celestial quarters—and that a fair share of his modest fortune should come in a lump to Cynthia.

Cynthia admitted this quite calmly to herself. Her parents, belonging to an older generation, preserved an outward appearance of regret. Indeed, Mr. Buckley really persuaded himself that the world was a shade darker for the passing of an elder brother who had bullied him in boyhood and had been a stranger during the greater part of his manhood. Mrs. Buckley, curi-

ously enough—for she had not been at all intimate with the departed—wept abundantly, but soon dried her tears and began to make plans.

Nobody could deny that Cynthia had done well with her drawing. It seemed fortunate that the high school had put in art while she was a sophomore, for otherwise this talent might forever have blushed unseen. Cynthia took to drawing, as her father aptly phrased it, like a duck to water.

Cynthia's father kept the hardware-store. He was a serious, rotund man, who from the day of his daughter's birth saw to it that his customers were informed concerning her abilities and virtues.

"Why," he would say, "that girl can draw a bouquet of roses so lifelike you can smell 'em! Miss Laville says she never had any one go ahead faster."

Cynthia was not content with roses. Indeed, they were but a gesture of beginning. She passed from flowers to scenery, from scenery to animals, from animals to the human form divine. She graduated from

crayon to water-colors, from water-colors to oil.

She was really working in oil when she graduated from the high school, and the products of her brush, when exhibited during commencement week, were much admired. Her painting of "Hogback Mountain as Seen at Sunrise"—for Cynthia had the unconventionality of genius, and would get up at five o'clock of a spring morning to paint—had special mention in the *Weekly Gazette*.

Old Mr. Waring, who represented the awful dignity of capital in Middleton, was caught off his guard when Cynthia read her graduating essay on "Modern Movements in Art," and spoke of getting her a scholarship in New York, where, he believed, there were art schools. Cynthia, in rapt moments, dreamed of Paris; but Mr. Waring's enthusiasms, whenever they threatened to cost money, soon evaporated. The indications were that if Uncle Ernest had not died when his time was ripe, she would have been condemned to the State normal school, from which she would have emerged a teacher of drawing. Uncle Ernest made New York possible.

Mrs. Buckley had read about Greenwich Village, and knew that a young girl could not safely go to New York alone. A smoldering coal of adventure took fire within her. She decided to go to New York with her daughter, and to remain until Cynthia was safely settled under auspices favorable both to her art and to her morals.

Cynthia's bright gaze dampened when this maternal project was explained to her; but, like a wise modern daughter, she put the emphasis in a judicious place.

"It would be lovely for me, ma," she objected; "but what about pa? I can take care of myself, but he's as helpless as a baby."

"I have thought about that," replied Mrs. Buckley, looking at Cynthia and pushing the toast a little nearer to Mr. Buckley, who was reading his newspaper. "Pa can get his breakfasts at home and his lunches and suppers at the hotel. Mr. Grover is serving real nice board, everybody says, and your father can get on perfectly well for a few months without me. Can't you, pa?"

"Why, yes," hesitated Mr. Buckley, an expression of bewilderment beginning in his eyes and spreading like ripples from a stone dropped in the water. He put down

his *Free Press* and looked at his wife and daughter, both of them handsome, forceful women. "Why, yes," he repeated; "but—but this takes me a little by surprise." He made a feeble gesture of indecision. "We'll have to think about it." He studied his wife's face, as if in hope that she was not serious. "Well," he went on hastily, "I've got to get up to the store."

He put on his hat and walked out, waving an ineffectual hand as he closed the door.

"Your father," said Mrs. Buckley, "belongs to the past generation. We'll persuade him, Cynthia. He just needs time to think it over."

What Cynthia was thinking was that if her father belonged to any past generation it must be at least the third one back, for her mother, in her opinion, was definitely to be assigned to the late Victorian era.

"Poor ma!" she thought. "She doesn't understand." Then, fiercely, gazing out at the sun-speckled lawn: "Why can't they leave me alone? Why can't they let me live my own life?"

Cynthia had no confidante. She had no love-affairs, except her ardent admiration for the portrait of an actor, which she had cut out of "The Silent Drama" and pasted in her diary.

It is just possible, however, that Dick Eagan's unrequited passion might be called a love-affair. Dick was a delicate youth, somewhat good-looking, who worked in his father's drug-store and was considered an excellent match; but he and the other Middleton boys were not up to Cynthia's standards. Like her father and mother, they didn't understand.

She kept her aspirations to herself, therefore, even when her heart was wrung by the farewell party, in the midst of which she moved, as it seemed to her, like a fairy princess. The evening was terminated by a final passionate appeal from Dick to give him, as he put it, "something to live for." Cynthia was obdurate, but she enjoyed Dick tremendously, and was glad to have him figure as a conspicuous sufferer in the little group that went to the station to see them off.

Cynthia wore a trim horizon-blue suit, and a small, tight hat with a veil. She thought she looked very pretty, and she really did. She did not completely approve of her mother's black suit and renovated hat.

"Ma needs educating," she thought. "Well, I'm glad to see the last of this darned old town!"

Aloud she said the proper things, shook hands carelessly with the almost weeping Dick, and kissed her father affectionately upon his puzzled lips.

II

As the journey proceeded, Cynthia's thoughts about her mother were confused and inconsistent. She understood that if Mrs. Buckley had opposed her going she would not now be leaving Middleton safely behind. With one word of encouragement Mr. Buckley would have shaken his wise head, patted his wilful daughter affectionately on the shoulder-blade, and—as Cynthia looked at it—sentenced her to life imprisonment in Middleton. It was that queer, that unaccountable flash of adventurousness in Mrs. Buckley that had made the escape possible.

But was it really an escape? Wasn't Cynthia really taking Middleton and all its traditions and refinements along with her, in the person of her mother? Wasn't that Mrs. Buckley's intention? Cynthia had misgivings that it was.

"Your father was pretty badly cut up about your leaving," observed Mrs. Buckley. "So," she added coily, "was Dick Eagan."

"I've no doubt they both were," returned Cynthia coolly; "but as far as pa is concerned, I don't think we need worry. Probably he would like a change as much as the rest of us."

Mrs. Buckley looked worried, and half rose from her seat.

"What do you mean?" she inquired tremulously.

"Oh, nothing!" Cynthia said recklessly. "Only I guess everybody gets tired of his or her home town and family sometimes. I guess there aren't many people who haven't had fits when they'd like to walk down Elm Street with a rock in each hand and smash all the windows in sight. It's always looking at the same windows with the same people behind them that drives me wild."

"You don't seem a bit homesick," commented Mrs. Buckley dryly.

"No, not yet," returned Cynthia. To herself she said: "Homesick? Good God!"

She liked to roll strong language around on her tongue without uttering it. It made

her feel more free and independent, as if the trammels of sex had been removed.

"Relationships are funny," she resumed after a long silence.

"You come of a good family, Cynthia," her mother answered. "You ought to be proud of it."

"That isn't what I mean, mother," Cynthia explained.

She made a wry face at the scenery, for as a matter of fact that was precisely what she did mean. She distinctly was not proud of her family, for she wanted to be an individual, and families tend to prevent such ambitions.

"Darn ancestors!" she thought. "Why can't they let us alone? We never interfered with them!"

To her mother, however, she said quite tranquilly:

"I mean it's funny that you and I and father should be living together—at least, it's funny that you and I and father and I should be. I never really picked you out, and you never picked me out. Why shouldn't I get along as well with a perfect stranger once I got used to him—or her?"

"Why, Cynthia!" Mrs. Buckley was genuinely shocked. "I never heard you talk this way before. It seems to me you've been getting queer ideas in your head."

"Oh, nothing serious, mother. I don't suppose you'd understand, anyhow. Ideas are different now from what they were when you were a girl."

Mrs. Buckley sighed. She had done what seemed to her an unprecedented thing when she left Middleton with her daughter, and her reward was to be classed with the relics of a past generation, and to be treated as if she were on the intellectual level of the ladies of the Congregational sewing circle, who at that moment, as she well knew, were battenning on the scandal—for such they would make it appear—in the Buckley family.

The excitement of the journey and of the first few days in New York prevented much further discussion. Profiting by the fact that Mrs. Buckley did not know where Greenwich Village was, Cynthia led her mother directly to an address which she had obtained before leaving home; and before the shock had worn off she had settled her in a dingy studio apartment, without any connecting bath, a block from Washington Square.

Outside the windows the Elevated trains groaned up and down their creaking structures, trucks rumbled night and day over the badly paved streets, and children, having nowhere else to go, played violently in and out amid the traffic. It was Mrs. Buckley, after a day in these surroundings, who sat down and wept, and Cynthia, with a far-away look in her eyes—a look almost of hope—who comforted her.

"You've just got to get used to it," she argued. "At your age that takes time; but you're going to enjoy it, mother. If you don't, all you have to do at any time is to jump on a train and go home."

"If she only would go home!" Cynthia inwardly moaned. "If she only would go home and leave me here! If she only would go home and let me live my own life!"

"I'll never get used to it," Mrs. Buckley sobbed; "but I won't desert you, Cynthia. I won't have it said that I went off and left my own little girl all alone in this big, strange city."

Cynthia clutched her tightly and patted her head.

"There, there," she whispered soothingly. "It's all right, mother. You're going to like it."

But she lifted her own gaze fiercely to the rows of washing on the neighboring roofs.

"Why can't they leave me alone? Why can't they leave me to live my own life? Why must they be cluttering up my career with their silly little egotisms?"

She wondered what her mother would do if she said this aloud. She wished she had courage to say it aloud.

III

NEITHER Cynthia's artistic career nor her social life progressed as rapidly as she had hoped. The teacher to whom she was recommended was a magnificent creature who refused to listen to her accounts of her previous education, or to look at any of her previous work, although he studied her features with a manner that made her suspect that he might be memorizing them for a portrait.

"We won't bother about that just now," he said, retaining her hand in his for a moment.

He assigned her to a class of beginners who were drawing infinite numbers of straight and curved lines. When Cynthia

sought to show her originality by making a pencil sketch of him, he looked at it with a curiously blended expression of interest and disapproval, and then handed it back.

"Clever," he said with a meaning smile. "Clever and complimentary; but not art, Miss Buckley, not art."

Cynthia rarely blushed, but now she became conscious of flushed cheeks and a wild desire to cry.

When she went home in this mood, she found her mother quite cheerful. Mrs. Buckley had been out marketing, and was cooking supper over the two-plate gas-stove behind the screen.

"I've found a real nice vegetable man," she explained. "He used to live out our way, and knew about some of your father's relatives. I shouldn't wonder if people were as human here as in Middleton. And what do you suppose I'm making you? Scalloped tomatoes!"

Cynthia burst into a wail of anguish.

"I don't want any!" she moaned. "I'm not hungry! I want—"

She stopped herself in time. She had almost said that she wanted to go home. The shock sobered her.

"No, I don't want to go home," she said to herself. "I don't want to go home. I just want to go away from that horrible man. I want to go where people will understand. I want to live my own life!"

Her mother gave her some peppermint in water, and after that some tea, and subsequently some scalloped tomatoes and Hamburger steak, and before she went to bed she was quite cheerful again.

"Does Professor Van Lant like your work?" Mrs. Buckley asked, as they were getting ready for bed.

Cynthia shook her dark hair all about her face.

"I am pretty," she mused. "I'm darned pretty. I'll show him! I'll show all of them!"

"What's that?" inquired her mother.

"Oh, nothing! I was just going to say that of course I hadn't got far enough along for him to tell just yet. We're only drawing straight lines now."

However, Cynthia soon began to make progress, or to believe that she was making progress. This impression was strengthened by the altered manner of Professor Van Lant, who stopped more often at Cynthia's easel, and was more gentle in his criticisms.

He was a tall, dark, handsome man who wore his hair just long enough, his beard just straggly enough, his neckties just flowing enough, his coat just loose enough, his trousers just baggy enough, to suggest but not to proclaim the artist. His eyes were brown, and full of soft lights, as Cynthia thought. Sometimes, when he bent over her chair at a certain angle, she felt his warm breath on her neck, and she liked that.

"I haven't the least intention of falling in love," she assured herself; "but there is no reason on earth why I should conceal anything from myself. He is a man, I am a woman, that accounts for everything—or anything!"

She thought, too, that it could do no harm to keep on the good side of Professor Van Lant. Friends came in handy in making a career.

"What sort of a man is your teacher?" Mrs. Buckley asked.

"Oh, good-looking and a bit conceited." Cynthia said this with complete carelessness. "He's very clever, though. He's had pictures in the exhibitions."

"Is he married?"

"No—that is, his wife left him. She got a divorce. The girls say she didn't understand him." Few people did understand each other in Cynthia's world. "But"—Cynthia did not care to dwell on this aspect of Professor Van Lant's affairs—"nobody thinks much of that here."

Mrs. Buckley was shocked, as Cynthia knew she would be; but she braced herself, with some vague notion of doing in Rome as the Romans did, and said nothing.

IV

A FEW days later Cynthia came home with a new idea.

"Mother," she announced, "I'm going to give a studio party."

"What put that into your head?" began Mrs. Buckley. "There isn't room here for more than four people."

Her conceptions were founded on the eight-room house in Middleton, which had a sitting-room and a parlor capable of being thrown together by the simple process of looping back the portières.

Cynthia was all confidence.

"We'll put the Japanese screen in front of the gas-plate." They had a Japanese screen by this time, as well as a piece of purple and gold batik, and a hand-painted

lamp-shade which dimmed the room beautifully and made evening reading difficult for Mrs. Buckley. "We'll pull the couch out and pile sofa-pillows on the floor. People who can't find a place to sit down can stand up. I'll only ask fifteen or twenty—just the people at the studio."

"Are you going to ask Professor Van Lant?"

"I suppose so," said Cynthia, who was giving the party for that purpose.

Mrs. Buckley was no novice at entertaining after the style of Middleton, but the approaching party threw her into a panic. This was different from being hostess to the Ladies' Aid or the Philomathian Society. What did people do at parties in New York? Cynthia said that they talked; but what did they talk about? Toward the last Mrs. Buckley almost hoped that Professor Van Lant, at least, would fall ill, or that she or Cynthia would, or that the house would catch fire.

But the party was not as difficult as she had expected, and Professor Van Lant made everything as easy as possible.

"Nobody would have thought," declared Mrs. Buckley, after it was all over, "that he was a famous artist. Why, he was as natural and easy as could be! He says he was brought up on a farm himself, and he asked me about my cake recipe, and whether we were related to the Boston Buckleys, and how I liked New York. He says I really must visit the studio some afternoon and have tea. He thinks your work shows great promise, Cynthia. He said I ought to be proud of you. He admires the modern girl, he says, because she's so independent and self-reliant. Then he seemed to be afraid he had said something that would hurt my feelings, and he said he guessed it was the modern mothers who really deserved the credit. He's really not much younger than I—"

Cynthia frowned.

"He's not forty yet," she corrected. "And he seems young. I don't think people let themselves grow old as fast here in New York as they do in country towns. It doesn't seem to make so much difference, either. You don't care how old people are here. It's what they're interested in that matters."

"He went home with that pretty blonde, didn't he?" asked Mrs. Buckley.

"I didn't notice," answered Cynthia, who had noticed most particularly. "I

don't see what he finds so fascinating in her."

"Neither do I," returned her mother quickly; "but don't you like the red-haired one—Miss What's-Her-Name?"

"Of course I do," Cynthia admitted. "She has a lot of ability. She's an awfully sweet girl, too."

She scrutinized herself carefully, as she always did, before going to bed.

"You'll do," she whispered, pointing her chin up sidewise, and looking at herself out of the corners of her eyes. "You'll do as well as any of them!"

After that Professor Van Lant called upon the Buckleys, and the Buckleys went to Sunday afternoon tea at his studio. Then he called again, and fell into the habit of calling, usually without previous announcement. Once he took Mrs. Buckley and Cynthia to dinner, and afterward to a play—"The Jest."

Mrs. Buckley had misgivings, mingled with quivers of sheer delight. What a story she would have to tell when she got home again! But home and Mr. Buckley could wait a few months longer, for she was not as homesick as she had been.

"I think Cynthia needs me," she wrote to her husband, who had dropped piteous hints of undarned socks and of eight desolate and neglected rooms. "I have decided to stay on until I can find just the right place for her. No, you needn't come down. You needn't worry a bit about us, though you know we're both as anxious as can be to see you."

The Buckleys' acquaintance with Professor Van Lant and Cynthia's apparent adeptness in painting increased with equal swiftness. Cynthia now decorated the room with her own sketches, and talked of having a picture in the next exhibition of the Independents. Uncle Ernest's nest-egg was diminishing little by little, but the end was still far off.

However, Cynthia was not without her perplexities.

"All right, Cynthia, so far," she would soliloquize. "All right so far; but now that you've got him, what are you going to do with him?"

This was really quite a problem. What was a girl of nineteen or twenty to do with a handsome artist who didn't show his age, but who was certainly nearing forty? Freedom was magnificent, but what did one get out of it?

"Sex is not any more important than art," Cynthia repeated angrily. "It has been very much exaggerated. I'm not going to be a silly, romantic little fool!"

There was manifestly an advantage in being a good friend of an influential artist—an advantage which no girl in her senses could sneeze at. Cynthia did her best to look at it coolly. New York was her oyster, to be opened by whatever means offered. If Professor Van Lant was an oyster-knife, she ought to utilize him.

But how far ought she to let him go? Ought she to let him kiss her?

While she was debating this point he did kiss her. She had returned to the studio after class to get her gloves. It was so foolish of her to forget them, she explained. Really she had never done such a thing before.

Professor Van Lant looked full at her with his expressive brown eyes.

"If you could only paint eyes!" thought Cynthia, in the midst of this tremendous experience.

"Foolish?" he was saying. "Why, I call it very sensible. If you hadn't forgotten the gloves, we wouldn't have had the pleasure of this meeting all alone."

"Yes," agreed Cynthia brightly. "We are all alone, aren't we?"

She could think of nothing else to say. There was an uncomfortable pause—or was it uncomfortable?

Her eyes wandered to her own corner, and to the sketch upon which she had been working. Somehow she seemed to have made progress during the last few minutes, and now she saw clearly that the picture was not promising.

"Professor Van Lant," she burst out, "do you really think I can ever do anything with my painting? Do you think I can even do Sunday comics?"

He looked disappointed.

"Let's not talk about that now," he coaxed. "It's after hours. We mustn't talk shop after hours."

"I have to go on thinking and living after hours." Cynthia was on the defensive. "And my mother goes on worrying after hours."

She felt like crying now, and bit her lip angrily.

"There, there!" he murmured, as if in an effort to console her.

"You make me tired!" she flashed, surprising herself. "You talk to me as if I

were a little girl. I'm not a little girl—I'm a woman!"

"A little woman," he amended gravely.

His smooth white cheek, with the beard edging up on it, attracted and held Cynthia's attention. She drew back and slapped it stingingly.

"There!" she gasped. "There!"

A look of astonishment spread over the artist's face. It was followed by an expression of pleasure.

"Why, you little vixen!" he cried.

"You pretty little vixen!"

It was then that he kissed her. Cynthia yielded suddenly, buried her face on his shoulder, and sobbed. Van Lant softly touched her hair.

"There, there!" he repeated softly, as if it were the only word he knew. "There, there, there!"

A momentary silence. Above her shoulder his face may have assumed a guilty expression, but Cynthia did not see it.

"Why should you bother your pretty head about art? You are art!"

He was beginning to recover his gallantry. Cynthia shook herself loose. A terrible thought had recurred to her.

"No!" She waved him back. "Don't touch me! I want to ask you something. Have I any talent? Can I ever amount to anything? You can't imagine how much it means to me!"

Again Van Lant looked disappointed.

"You don't need to know anything about art," he began.

Cynthia turned a despairing gaze full upon him.

"Oh!" she cried. "How cruel, how terribly cruel!"

She seized her gloves, opened the door before he could stop her, and fled to the street.

V

CYNTHIA heard the professor take a hasty step, heard him ejaculate something, but she did not pause. When she reached home she almost broke Mrs. Buckley's heart by refusing a supper of baked ham and corn, Southern style. Her excuse of a headache saved explanations, but it did not save her from turning the wretched question over and over in her mind until it actually did give her a headache.

In this mood she accepted beef tea and peppermint in water almost gratefully, and listened with something approaching eager-

ness to her father's latest letter, which had arrived in the morning. This is part of what Mr. Buckley wrote:

Business is pretty fair, but nothing to brag about. The cat has run away, and I have seen nothing of it for a week or more. It has been hot. I suppose it is hot in New York, too. Dick Eagan was asking after Cynthia the other day. He seemed to be quite interested, I don't understand why.

"He still seems able to joke," commented Mrs. Buckley, with a meaning glance at her daughter. "Dick's a nice boy, too."

"Dick," retorted Cynthia, "is a horrid little upstart. I wish father would have sense enough not to talk that way! There's no telling what he said to Dick."

"Do you really like it here?" asked Mrs. Buckley, after a while. "I mean, are you really happy?"

Cynthia considered before replying.

"I don't know what you mean by being happy. I wouldn't go back for anything. I hate Middleton! I hate Dick Eagan!"

"There, there!" murmured Mrs. Buckley. "You'd better go to sleep now."

Cynthia sat up in bed and glared.

"Mother, I won't be there—there'd at! I'm not an infant. When I said I hated Dick Eagan I meant it. Why shouldn't I have opinions about people? Just because I'm a girl you needn't think I can't make up my mind!"

She turned her back resolutely and went to sleep as quickly as she had ever done in her life.

At breakfast Mrs. Buckley delicately resumed the subject.

"I think we ought to be thankful we've made so many friends here," she said. "I'm sure I never expected it. Professor Van Lant seems to take a real personal interest in you. He's been very kind to me, too. You know, Cynthia"—a slight flush stole into her cheeks—"he makes me think a little of Dick Eagan's father when he was a boy. He was such a handsome fellow! All of us were wild about him. I guess he could have had any of us for the asking."

"That would have been a little hard on me," observed Cynthia tartly. "I'm perfectly satisfied not to have Dick Eagan for a brother."

Mrs. Buckley turned this over in her mind for some moments.

"Well, of course," she resumed, "he wouldn't have been the Dick Eagan we know, would he?"

Cynthia was digging viciously into her grapefruit, sending little spatters of juice over the table-cloth, and Mrs. Buckley continued her monologue. She had reached a conclusion which she believed would please her daughter immensely.

"I feel so well settled here that I have half a mind to spend the winter with you. We could get on very nicely, and your father could come down for a month. He needs a vacation, and he's got Jim Butterworth so well trained that he can leave the store to him as easy as not. Jim's thoroughly reliable since he quit drinking."

Cynthia tried to imagine her father walking up and down Fifth Avenue, attending one of the popular shows, participating in a studio party, visiting the painting classes, meeting Professor Van Lant, standing by while Professor Van Lant—whose wife had left him—kissed her. She almost choked on her egg.

The day's work was trying. Cynthia concluded that it must always be trying to pretend to be quite indifferent to a teacher of painting who had surreptitiously kissed one. She did not dare to look directly at Professor Van Lant. When he came near her in his regular rounds, she addressed him with careful coolness. Underneath his professional manner she sensed a significant eagerness.

Before the class was over, he managed to slip a note into her hand—an invitation to dinner. "*Alone*," he had added, underlining the word.

"Well, Cynthia," she told herself, "you might as well have it out!"

After class she waited for him. When they were alone he closed the door and took both her hands, but with an uneasy expression on his fine countenance.

"I think we should be more careful. We ought not to be seen leaving here together."

"Why?" asked Cynthia, blazing again, for some unanalyzed reason.

"Well—" A long hesitation. "My wife—"

"Then you're not—"

"Why, no," he answered, guessing her question all too readily. "The decree hasn't been entered yet; but she's out of my life. We can be—friends."

Something that was not the Cynthia of the great adventure suddenly sprang into being. For the second time in twenty-four hours she turned abruptly and fled from Professor Van Lant.

This time he followed her to the door, to the head of the stairs, part way down the first flight.

"For Heaven's sake," she heard him cry, "what is the matter? What have I done? Aren't you coming back?"

She stopped to whip one stinging sentence at him.

"You'd better ask your wife that, Professor Van Lant. That's her business, not mine!"

Exultingly, glorified, full of the fire and joy of life, forgetting her humiliation, Cynthia almost ran—she was, irrationally, in too great a hurry to take the subway—all the way to Washington Square. She sprang up the stairs and burst into the apartment where Mrs. Buckley was already putting the onions on to cook.

"My!" cried Cynthia. "How good those onions smell!"

"They aren't very stylish," Mrs. Buckley apologized; "but I knew you didn't expect company to-night, and I thought they'd seem home-like."

Cynthia slowly took off her hat and carefully looked herself over in her mirror. The exultation was oozing out; a grayness, enduring but impenetrable, was descending.

"You're very pretty," she told the image. "You're as pretty as can be, but you're licked! You can't get away—not this generation. Maybe your daughter—yours and Dick's—can make a go of it, but you can't. Oh, you can get Dick easy enough, and he'll make money, and you'll be president of the Philomathian Society and give the darnedest card parties!" She drew a long, sobbing breath. "But you're licked, Cynthia!"

She straightened her disordered hair and walked slowly across the room.

"Mother," she said evenly, her eyes dry, "I'm not cut out to be an artist. Let's go home!"

A look of consternation appeared in Mrs. Buckley's face. A light which had recently been in it went out as if turned off from within. The odor of boiling onions pervaded the room. The clock ticked violently. The Elevated trains roared and surged, like the great sea of metropolitan life.

Mr. Buckley was touchingly glad to see them, and when Mrs. Buckley had finished the sewing and darning which had accumulated during her absence, it was time to begin on Cynthia's trousseau.

Desert Dust*

A ROMANCE OF THE BUILDING OF THE GREAT AMERICAN WEST

By Edwin L. Sabin

Author of "Scarface Ranch," "Opening the Iron Trail," etc.

XVII

THERE I stood, amid silence, gaping foolishly, breathing hard, my revolver smoking in my fingers. My enemy lay in a shockingly prone posture at my feet, gradually reddening the white of the torn soil. He was upon his face, with his revolver hand outflung. The moment had arrived and passed. I was standing here alive—I had killed him!

Then I heard myself babbling.

"Have I killed him? I didn't want to! I tell you I didn't want to!"

Figures rushed in between. Hands grasped me, impelled me away, through a haze; voices spoke in my ear while I feebly resisted. I felt a warm, salty taste in my mouth.

"I killed him! I didn't want to kill him, but he made me do it. He shot first!"

"Yes, yes," one of them said, soothing gruffly. "Shore he did; shore you didn't. It's all right. Come along, come along!"

"Pick him up," suggested another. "He's bad hurt, himself. See that blood? No, 'tain't his arm, is it? He's bleedin' internal. Whar's the hole? Wait! He's busted something."

They would have carried me.

"No," I cried, while their bearded faces swam before my eyes. "He said 'Enough,' and shot me afterward. Not bad, is it? I can walk."

"Not bad. Creased you in the arm, if that's all. What you spittin' blood for?"

As they hustled me onward, I wiped my swollen lips. The back of my hand seemed to be covered with thin blood.

"Where he struck me," I wheezed.

"Yes, mebbe so; but come along, come along. We'll 'tend to you."

The world had grown curiously darkened, so that we moved as through an obscuring veil. I dumbly wondered whether this was night—had it been morning or evening when I started for the pond?—or whether I was dying. I peered around, and again made out the sober, stern faces hedging me; but they gave me no answer to my mutely anxious query.

Across a great distance we stumbled toward the wagons—the same wagons of a time ago—and halted at a fire.

"Set down. Fetch a blanket, somebody! Whar's the water? Set down till we look you over."

I let them seat me.

"Wash your mouth out."

I did so, and spat out a pinkish fluid. On a second washing, it was clearer.

"You're all right." Jenks apparently was ministering to me. "Swaller this."

The odor of whisky fumed into my nostrils. I obediently swallowed, and gasped and choked. Jenks wiped my face with a sopping cloth. Hands were rummaging at my left arm, and a bandage was being wound about it.

"Nothin' much," was the report. "Creased him—that's all. He was lucky to dodge. It was comin' straight for his heart!"

"He's all right," Jenks again asserted.

Under the stimulus of the liquor my faintness was leaving me. The slight hemorrhage from the strain to my weak lungs had ceased. I would live, I would live; but he—Daniel?

"Did I kill him?" I besought. "Not that! I didn't aim—I don't know how I shot—but I had to, didn't I?"

"You did. He'll not bother you agin. She's yourn."

* Copyright, 1921, by Edwin L. Sabin—This story began in the August number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

That hurt!

"But it wasn't about her, it wasn't over Mrs. Montoyo. He bullied me—dared me. We were man to man, boys. He made me fight him!"

"Yes, shore," they agreed.

But they did not believe me. They still linked me with a woman, whereas she had figured only as a transient incident.

Then she herself, my lady, appeared, running in breathless and appealing.

"Is Mr. Beeson hurt? Badly? Where is he? Let me help!"

She knelt beside me, her hand grasped mine, she gazed wide-eyed and imploring.

"No, he's all right, ma'am."

"I'm all right, I assure you," I mumbled thickly, helpless as a babe to the clinging of her cold fingers.

"How's the other man?" they abruptly asked her.

"I don't know. He was carried away; but I think he's dead. I hope so—oh, I hope so! The coward, the beast!"

"There, there," they quieted. "That's all over with. What he got is his own business. He hankered for it, and was bound to have it. You'd best stay right hyar a spell. It's the place for you at present."

They grouped apart on the edge of the circle about the flickering fire. The dusk had heightened apace, for this was really nightfall. The glow and flicker barely touched their blackly outlined forms, the murmur of their voices sounded ominous.

In the circle we two sat, her hand upon mine, thrilling me deliciously, yet abashing me. She surveyed me unwinkingly and gravely, triumph shining from her eyes, albeit there were seamy shadows etched into her white face. It was as if she were welcoming me through the outposts of hell.

"You killed him! I knew you would—I knew you'd have to!"

"I knew it, too," I miserably faltered; "but I didn't want to—I shot without thinking. I might have waited."

"Waited! How could you wait? 'Twas either you or he."

"Then I wish it had been I," I said.

"What nonsense!" she flashed. "We all know you did your best to avoid it. But tell me, do you think I dragged you into it? Do you hate me for it?"

"No. It happened when you were there—that's all. I'm sorry; only sorry. What's to be done next?"

"That will be decided, of course," she

said. "You will be protected, if necessary. You acted in self-defense. They all will swear to that and back you up."

"But you?" I asked, arousing from this unmanly despair which played me for a weakling. "You must be protected, too. You can't go to that other camp, can you?"

She laughed and withdrew her hand—laughed hardly, even scornfully.

"I? Above all things, don't concern yourself about me, please! I shall take care of myself. He is out of the way. You have freed me of that much, Mr. Beeson, whether intentionally or not; and you yourself shall be free to act as your friends advise. You must leave me out of your plans altogether. Yes, I know you killed him. Why not? He wasn't a man; he was a wild beast. And you'll find there are matters more serious than killing even a man in this country."

"You! You!" I insisted. "You shall be looked out for. We are partners in this. He used your name; he made that an excuse. We shall have to make some new arrangements for you. We must put you on the stage-coach as soon as we can. And meanwhile—"

"There is no partnership, and I shall require no looking after, sir," she interrupted. "If you are sorry that you killed him, I am not; but you are entirely free."

The group at the edge of the circle dissolved. Jenks came and seated himself upon his hams, beside us.

"Wall, how you feelin' now?" he questioned of me.

"I'm myself again," said I.

"Your arm won't trouble you. It's jest a flesh wound. There's nothin' better than axle-grease. And you, ma'am?"

"Perfectly well, thank you."

"You're the coolest of the lot, and no mistake!" he said admiringly. "Wall, there'll be no more fracas to-night. Anyhow, the boys 'll be on guard ag'in' it; they're out now. You two can eat and rest a bit, while gettin' good and ready. If you set out 'fore moon-up, you can easy get cl'ar, with what help we give you. We'll furnish mounts, grub, anything you need."

"Mounts!" I blurted, with a start that waked my arm to throbbing. "Set out, you say? Why? And where?"

"Anywhar. The stage road south'ard is your best bet. You didn't think to stay, did you? Not after that—after you'd plugged a Mormon, the old man's son! We

reckoned you two had it arranged, by this time."

"No! Never!" I protested. "You're crazy, man. I've never dreamed of any such thing; nor Mrs. Montoyo, either. You mean that I—we—should run away? I'll not leave the train, and neither shall she, until the proper time. Or do I understand that you disown us—turn your backs upon us—deliver us over?"

"Hold on!" Jenks bade. "You're barkin' up the wrong tree. 'Tain't a question of disownin' you. Hell, we'd fight for you, and proud to do it, for you're white! But I tell you, you've killed one o' that party ahead. You've killed the wagon boss's son; and Hyrum, he's consider'ble of a man himself. He stands well up in the church. Lettin' that alone, he's captain of this train, he's got a dozen and more men back of him; and when he comes in the mornin' demandin' of you for trial by his Mormons, what can we do? Might fight him off—yes; not forever, though. He's nearest to the water, seech as it is, and our casks are half empty, our critters dry. We sha'n't surrender you. If we break with him, we break ourselves, and likely lose our scalps into the bargain. Why, we hadn't any idee but that you and her were all primed to light out, with our help. If you stay, you won't be safe anywhere betwixt here and Salt Lake; and over in Utah they'll vigilante you, shore as kingdom! As for you, ma'am"—he bluntly addressed my lady—"we'd protect you to the best of our ability, o' course; but you can see for yourself that Hyrum won't feel none too kindly toward you, and that if you'll pull out along with Beeson as soon as convenient you'll avoid a heap of unpleasantness. We'll take the chance on sneakin' you both away, and facin' the old man."

"Mr. Beeson should go," she said; "but I shall return to the Adams camp. I am not afraid, sir."

"Tut, tut!" he rapped. "I know you're not afraid; nevertheless we won't let you do it."

"They wouldn't lay hands on me."

"Um-m," he mused. "Mebbe not. No, reckon they wouldn't. I'll say that much; but, by thunder, they'd make you wish they did! They'd claim you trapped Dan'l. You'd suffer for that. Better foller your new man, lady, and let him stow you in safety. Better go back to Benton."

"Never to Benton!" she declared. "And

he's not my 'new man.' I apologize to him for that, from you, sir."

"If you stay, I stay, then," said I; "but I think we'd best go. It's the only way."

And it was. We were twain in menace to the outfit and to each other, but inseparable. We were yoked.

The fact appalled me. It gripped me coldly. I seemed to have bargained for her with word and fist and bullet, and won her; now I should appear to carry her off as my booty—a wife, and a gambler's wife! Yet such must be.

"You shall go without me," she said.

"I shall not!" I replied firmly.

With a little sob, she buried her face in her hands.

"If you don't hate me now, you soon will," she uttered. "The cards don't fall right—they don't, they don't. They've been against me from the first. I'm always forcing the play!"

Whereupon I knew that go together we should, or I was no man.

"Pshaw, pshaw," Jenks soothed. "Matters ain't so bad. We'll fix ye out and cover your trail. Moon'll be up in a couple o' hours. I'd advise you to take an hour's start of it, so as to get away easier. If you travel straight south'ard you'll strike the stage road some time in the mornin'. When you reach a station you'll have ch'ice either way."

"I have money," she said; and sat erect.

XVIII

THE directions had been plain. With the North Star and the moon as our guides, we scarcely could fail to strike the stage road where it bore off from the mountains northward into the desert.

For the first half-mile we rode without a word from either of us to violate the truce that swathed us like the night. What her thoughts were I might not know; but they sat heavy upon her, closing her throat with the torture of vain self-reproach. That much I sensed; but I could not reassure her; could not volunteer to her that I welcomed her company, that she was blameless, that I had only defended my honor, that affairs would have come to pistol work without impulse from her—that, in short, the responsibility had been wholly Daniel's.

My own thoughts were so grievous as to crush me with aching woe that forebade civil utterance.

This, then, was I—somebody who had

just killed a man, had broken from the open trail, and was riding, he knew not where, through darkness worse than night. I was an outlaw with an outlawed woman—at the best an adventuring woman, product of dance-hall and gaming-resort, wife of a half-breed gambler, and now spoil of fist and revolver.

But that which burned me almost to madness, like hot lava underneath the deadening crust, was the thought that I had done a defensible deed, and was fleeing from it just like a criminal. Such a contingency never had occurred to me, or I might have taken a different course, still with decency; although what course I could not figure.

We rode, our mules picking their way, occasionally stumbling on rocks and shrubs. At last she spoke in low, even tone.

"What do you expect to do with me, please?"

"We shall have to do whatever is best for yourself," I managed to answer. "That will be determined when we reach the stage-line, I suppose."

"Thank you. Once at the stage-line, and I shall contrive. You must have no thought of me. I understand very well that we should not travel far in company—and you may not wish to go in my direction. You have plans of your own?"

"None of any great moment. Everything has failed me thus far. There is only the one place left—New York State, where I came from. I probably can work my way back—at least, until I can recoup by a telegraph message, or by the mails."

"You have one more place than I," she replied. She hesitated. "Will you let me lend you some money?"

"I've been paid my wages due," said I. "But," I added, "you have a place, you have a home—Benton."

"Oh, Benton!" She laughed under her breath. "Never Benton! I shall make shift without Benton."

"You will tell me, though?" I urged. "I must have your address, to know that you reach safety."

"You are strictly business. I believe I accused you before of being a Yankee!"

I read sarcasm in her words. Her voice had a quality of definite estimation which nettled, humbled, and isolated me, as if I lacked in some essential to a standard set.

"So you are going home, are you, Mr. Beeson?" she resumed. "With the clothes

on your back? Or will you stop at Benton for your trunk?"

"With the clothes on my back," I asserted bitterly. "I've no desire to see Benton. The trunk can be shipped to me."

She went on in her cool, impersonal tone.

"That is the easiest way. You will live warm and comfortably. You will need to wear no belt weapon, for the police will protect you. If a man injures you, you can summon him at law and wash your hands of him. Instead of staking on your luck among new people, you can enter into business among your friends, and win from them. You can marry the girl next door—or even take the chance of the one across the street, her parentage being *comme il faut*. You can tell stories of your trip into the Far West. Your children will love to hear of the mule-whackers' rough trail—yes, you will have great tales, but you will not mention that you killed a man who tried to kill you, and then rode for a night with a strange woman alone at your stirrup. Perhaps you will venture to revisit these parts by the railroad, and from the windows of your coach point out the places where you suffered the hardships and adventures of your earlier life. Your course is the safe course. By all means take it, Mr. Beeson, and have your trunk follow you!"

"That I shall do, madam," I retorted. "The West and I have not agreed, and I fear we never shall."

"By honest confession, it has bested you; and in short order."

"In short order," I agreed, "since you put it that way. Only a fool doesn't know when to quit."

"The greatest fool is the one who fools himself, in quitting as in other matters; but you will have no regrets—except about Daniel, possibly."

"None whatever, save the regret that I ever tried this country. I wish to God I had never seen it! I did not conceive that I should have to take a human life—should be forced to that—become like an outlaw in the night, riding for refuge—"

I choked passionately.

"You deserve much sympathy," she remarked in that even tone.

I lapsed into a turbulence of voiceless rage at myself, at her, at Daniel's treachery, at all the train, at Benton, and again at this damning predicament wherein I had landed. When I was bound to wrest free

after having done my utmost, she appeared to be twitting me because I would not submit to further use by her. I certainly had the right to extricate myself in the only way left.

So, as I conned over and over, my heart gnawed, and the acid of vexation boiled in my throat, and despite the axle-grease my arm pained me. We rode unspeaking, like some guilty pair through purgatory.

My lip had subsided; the pistol wound was superficial. Under different circumstances our way would have been full of beauty. The high desert stretched vastly, far, far before, behind, on either side, the parched gauntness of its daytime aspect assuaged and evanescent. For the moon, now risen, although on the wane, shed a light sufficient, whitening the rocks and the scattered low shrubs, painting the land with sharp black shadows, and girding us about with the mystery of great softly illumined spaces into which silent forms vanished as if tempting us aside. Of these—rabbits, wolves, animals only to be guessed—there were many, like potential fantoms quickened by the touch of the moonbeams. Mule-back, we twain towered, the sole intruders visible between the glorified earth and the beatific sky.

Our course was southward. After a time it seemed to me that we were descending from the plateau. We pushed onward down a long, gradual slope until, in a mile or so, we were again upon the level, cutting through another basin formed by the dried bed of an ancient lake whose waters had evaporated into deposits of salt and soda.

At first the mules had plodded on with ears pricked forward, and with sundry snorts and stares, as if they were seeing portents in the moonshine. Eventually their imaginings seemed to have dulled, so that they now moved careless of where or why, their heads drooped, their minds devoted to achieving what rest they might in the merely mechanical setting of hoof before hoof.

I could not but be aware of my companion. Her hair glinted faintly in the dim light, for she rode bareheaded. Her gown, tightened under her as she sat astride, revealed the lines of her boyish limbs. She was a woman, in any guise; and I, being a man, felt that I must protect her to the limit of my powers.

I found myself wishing that we could upturn something pleasant to talk about.

It seemed ungracious, even wicked, to ride thus side by side through peace and beauty, with lips closed and war in our hearts, and final parting as our main desire.

But her firm pose and her face held steadily to the fore invited with no sign; and after covertly stealing a glance or two at her clear, unresponsive profile, I still could manage no theme that would loosen my tongue. Let her think me a dolt! Thank Heaven, after another twenty-four hours, at most, it might not matter what she thought.

The drooning round of my own thoughts revolved over and over, and the scuffling gait of the mules upon the interminable way began to numb me. Lassitude seemed to be enfolding us both. I observed that she rode laxly, with one hand upon the horn of her saddle, and with a weary yielding to the motion of her mount. Words might have stirred us, but no words came.

Presently I caught myself dozing in the saddle, aroused only by the twitching of my wounded arm. Then again I dozed, and kept dozing, fairly dead for sleep, until speak she did, her voice drifting as from afar, but fetching me awake and blinking.

"Hadn't we better stop?" she said, and repeated it when I did not answer.

That was a curious sensation. When I stared about, uncomprehending, my view was shut off by a whiteness veiling the moon above and the earth below, except immediately underneath my mule's hoofs. She herself was a specter; the weeds that we brushed were spectral. Every sound that we made was muffled, and in the intangible, opaquely lucent shroud which had enveloped us like the spirit of a sea there was neither life nor movement.

"What's the matter?" I propounded.

"The fog. I don't know where we are."

"Oh! I hadn't noticed."

"No," she said calmly. "You've been asleep."

"Haven't you?"

"Not lately. I don't think there's any use in riding on. We've lost our bearings."

She was ahead; evidently she had taken the lead while I slept. That realization straightened me, shamed, in my saddle. The fog, fleecy, not so wet as impenetrable—when had it engulfed us?

"How long have we been in it?" I asked, thoroughly vexed.

"An hour, maybe. We rode right into it. I thought we might leave it, but we

don't. It's as thick as ever. We ought to stop."

"I suppose we ought," said I.

At the moment we entered into a sort of clearing amid the fog—a tract of a quarter of an acre, like a hollow center, with the white walls held apart and the stars and moon faintly glimmering down through the roof of mist overhead.

She drew rein and half turned in the saddle. I could see her face. It was dank, wan, and heavy-eyed; her hair, somewhat robbed of its sheen, was crowned with a pallid golden aureole.

"Will this do? If we go on, we'll only be riding into the fog again."

I was conscious of the thin, apparently distant piping of frogs.

"There seems to be water near us," she said.

"Yes, we'd better stop where we are," I agreed. "Then in the morning we can take stock."

"In the morning, surely. We may not be far astray."

She swung off before I had awkwardly dismounted to help her. Her limbs failed—my own were cramped by stiffness—and she staggered and collapsed with a little laugh.

"I'm tired," she confessed. "Wait just a moment."

"You stay where you are," I ordered, staggering also as I hastily landed. "I'll make camp."

But she would have none of that. She pleaded my one-handedness and insisted upon cooperating with the mules. We seemed to be marooned upon a small rise of gravel and coarsely matted dried grasses. The animals were staked out, and fell to nibbling. Seeking out a spot for our beds, I laid down a buffalo robe for her, and placed her saddle as her pillow.

She sank down with a sigh, tucking her skirt under her, and I folded the robe over. Her face gazed up at me; she extended her hand.

"You are very kind, sir," she said with a smile that pathetically curved her lips.

There, at my knees, she looked so worn, so slight, so childish, so much in need of being assured that all was well and that she had a friend to serve her, that I felt a rush of sudden sympathy. Indeed, I could have kissed her—upon the forehead, if not upon the lips themselves. It was an impulse well-nigh overmastering—an impulse that

must have dazed me so that she saw or felt it, for a tinge of pink swept into her skin. She withdrew her hand.

"Good night! Please sleep. In the morning we shall reach the stage road, and your troubles will be near the end."

Under my own robe I lay for a long time reviewing past and present and discussing with myself the future.

Strangely enough, the present occupied me the most. It incorporated with the unknown future beyond the fog; and when I put her out, back she came, as if she were part and parcel of my life. She was entwined with the warp and woof of all my memories dating back to my entrance, fresh and hopeful, into the new West. It rather flabbergasted me to find myself thinking that the future was going to be very tame—perhaps, as she had suggested, regretful. I had not apprehended that the end would be so drastic.

Whether my regret would center upon my slinking home defeated, or upon having definitely cast her away, puzzled me not a little. It also troubled me to discover that I was well content to be here, with her, in our little clearing amid the desert fog, listening to her soft breathing. I debated what she might have done had I actually kissed her to comfort her and assure her that I was not unmindful of her brave spirit.

Daniel had been disposed of; Montoyo did not deserve her; I had won her. She could inspire and guide me if I stayed. I saw myself staying, and I saw myself going home, and I already regretted a host of things, as a man will when at the forking of the trails.

The fog gently closed in during the night. When I awakened, we were again enshrouded by the fleece of it, denser than when we had ridden through it, but now whiter with the dawn.

As I gazed sleepily about, I could just make out the forms of the two mules, standing motionless and huddled. I could see her more clearly, at shorter distance—her buffalo robe moist with the semblance of dew that had also beaded upon her massy hair.

Evidently she had not stirred all night. She might be still asleep. No—her eyes were open, and when I stiffly shifted posture she looked across at me.

"Sh!" she warned, with a quick shake of her head.

The warning bade me listen. In a moment I heard voices.

XIX

THEY were indistinguishable except as vocal sounds deadened by the impeding fog; but human voices they certainly were. Throwing off her robe, she abruptly sat up, looking around her, her features tensed with the strain.

She beckoned to me. I scuttled over, as anxious as she. The voices might be far, they might be near; but it was an eerie situation, as if we were among ghosts.

"I've been hearing them some little while," she whispered.

"Captain Adams's men may be trailing us," I suggested.

"I hope not! Oh, I hope not!" she gasped, in sheer agony. "If we could only know in time!"

Suddenly the fog was shot with gold, as the sun flashed in. In obedience to the command, a slow and stately movement was begun by all the troops of mist. The myriad elements drifted in unison, marching and countermarching and rearranging, until presently, while we crouched intent to fathom the secrets of their late camp, a wondrously beautiful phenomenon offered.

The great army rose for flight, lifting like a blanket, and gradually the earth appeared in glimpses beneath their floating array. Whereas our plot of higher ground was still invested, stooping low and scanning we could see beyond us by the extent of a narrow, thinning belt capped with the heavier white.

"There!" she whispered, pointing. "Look! There they are!"

Feet, legs, moving of themselves, cut off at the knees by the fog layer, distant not more than short rifle range—that was what had been revealed. It was a peculiar, absurd spectacle, as if a score or two of amputated limbs had been resurrected and were blindly going in quest of bodies.

"The Mormons!" I faltered.

"No! Leggings! Moccasins! They are Indians. We must slip away before they see us!"

With our stuff she ran, I ran, for the mules. We worked rapidly, bridling and saddling, while the fog rose with measured steadiness.

"Hurry!" she bade.

The whole desert was a golden haze when, having hastily packed, we climbed

aboard—she more spry than I, so that she led again.

As we urged outward, the legs, behind, had taken to themselves thighs; but the mist briefly eddied down upon us again. Our mules' hoofs made no appreciable sound on the scantily moistened soil. We lost the legs and the voices.

Pressing the pace, I rode beside her.

"Where?" I inquired.

"As far as we can while the fog hangs. Then we must hide in the first good place. If they don't strike our trail, we'll be all right."

The fog lingered in patches. From patch to patch we threaded, with many a glance over our shoulders; but time was traveling faster. I marked her searching about nervously.

Blue had already appeared above, the sun found us again and again, and the fog remnants went spinning and coiling in a last ghostly dance like that of frenzied wraiths.

Now we came to a rough outcrop of red sandstone, looming ruddily on our right. She quickly swerved for it.

"The best chance! I see nothing else," she muttered. "We can tie the mules under cover, and wait. We'll surely be spied if we keep on."

"Couldn't we risk it?"

"No. We've not start enough."

In a moment we had gained the refuge. The sculptured rock masses, detached one from another, several jutting ten feet up, received us. We tied the mules short, in a nook at the rear; and we ourselves crawled on, farther in, until we lay snug amid the shadowing buttresses, with the desert vista opening before us.

The fog wraiths were very few. The sun blazed more vehemently and wiped them out, so that through the marvelously clear air the expanse of lone, weird country stood forth clean-cut. No moving object could escape notice in this crystal void.

We had been just in time. The slight knoll had been left not a mile to the southwest. I heard my lady catch her breath, and felt her hand find mine as we lay almost touching. Rounding the knoll there appeared a file of mounted figures. By their robes and blankets, their lances and shields—yes, by the very way they sat their painted ponies, Indians unmistakably!

"They must have been camped near us all night." She shuddered. "If only they don't cross our trail! We mustn't move."

They came on at a canter, riding bravely, glancing right and left—a score of them headed by a scarlet-blanketed man upon a spotted horse. So transparent was the air, washed by the fog and vivified by the sun, that I could decipher the color pattern of his shield emblazonry, a checkerboard of red and black.

"A war party—Sioux, I think," she said. "Don't they carry scalps on that first lance? They've been raiding the stage-line. Do you see any squaws?"

"No," I hazarded, with beating heart.

"All warriors, I should guess."

"All warriors!" she repeated. "But squaws would be worse."

On they cantered, until their stripes and daubs of paint were hideously plain, and we could note every detail of their savage muster. They were almost paralleling our outward course, but they seemed to be diverging from our ambush and making more to the west. And I had hopes that, after all, we were safe.

Then her hand clutched mine firmly. A wolf had leaped from covert in the path of the file, and was loping eastward across the desert. Instantly, with a whoop that echoed upon us like the crack of doom, a young fellow darted from the line in gay pursuit.

My lady drew quick breath, with a despairing exclamation.

"That is cruel, cruel! They might have ridden past; but now—look!"

The stripling warrior—he appeared to be scarcely more than a boy—hammered in chase, stringing his bow and plucking an arrow. The wolf cast an eye over a plunging shoulder, and lengthened to flee at top speed. Away they tore, while the file slackened, to watch.

Our trail of flight bore right athwart the wolf's projected route. There was just the remote chance that the lad would overrun it in his eagerness; and for that intervening moment of grace we stared, fascinated, hand clasping hand.

"He's found it! He's found it!" she announced in a little wail.

In mid career the boy had checked his pony so shortly that its four hoofs plowed the sand. He wheeled on a pivot and rode back for a few yards, scanning the ground, letting the wolf go. The stillness that had settled while we gazed, and the file of warriors, reining, gazed, gripped and fairly hurt.

I cursed the youth. Would to God he had stayed at home! God grant that that mangy wolf might die by trap or poison! Our one chance made the sport of an accidental view-halloo, when all the wide desert was open!

The youth had halted again, leaning from his saddle-pad. He raised, he flung up his hand, and commenced to ride in circles, around and around and around. The band galloped to him.

"Yes, he has found it," she said. "Now they will come!"

"What shall we do?" I asked her.

"I don't know," she answered, releasing my hand; "but we must wait. We can stand them off for a while, I suppose—"

"I'll do my best with the revolver," I promised.

"Yes," she murmured; "but after that—"

I had no reply. This contingency—were two facing Indians—was outside my calculations.

The Indians had grouped. Several had dismounted, peering closely at our trail, reading it, timing it, accurately estimating it. They had no difficulty, for the hoof-prints were hardly dried of the fog moisture. The others sat idly, searching the horizon with their eyes, but at confident ease.

In the wide expanse this rock fortress of ours seemed to me to summon imperatively, challenging them. They surely must know! Yet there they delayed, torturing us, playing blind, emulating cat and mouse; but of course they were reasoning and making certain.

Now the dismounted warriors vaulted ahorse. At a gesture from the chief two men rode aside, farther to the east, seeking other signs. They found none, and to his shrill hail they returned.

There was another command. The company had strung bows, stripped their rifles of buckskin sheaths, had dropped robe and blanket about their loins. They spread out to right and left in close skirmish order. They advanced three scouts, one on the trail, one on either flank; and in a broadened front they followed with a discipline, an earnestness, a precision of purpose, and a deadly anticipation that drowned every fleeting hope.

This was unbearable—to lie here awaiting an inevitable end!

"Shall we make a break for it?" I pro-

posed. "Ride and fight? We might reach the train, or a stage station. Quick!"

In my wild desire for action I half arose. Her hand restrained me.

"It would be madness, Mr. Beeson. We should stand no show at all in the open—not on these poor mules." She murmured to herself. "Yes, they're Sioux. That's not so bad. Were they Cheyennes—dog soldiers—let me think. I must talk with them!"

"But they're coming," I rasped. "They're getting in range. We have the gun and twenty cartridges. Maybe if I kill the chief—"

She spoke positively, under her breath.

"Don't shoot! Don't! They know we're here—know it perfectly well. I shall talk with them."

"You? How? Why? Can you persuade them? Would they let us go?"

"I'll do what I can. I have a few words of Sioux; and there's the sign language. See!" she said. "They've discovered our mules. They know we're only two."

The scouts on either flanks had galloped outward and onward, in swift circles, peering at our defenses. Lying low, they scoured at full speed. They crisscrossed beyond us, with loud whoops, and turned back for the main body halted two hundred yards out upon the flat plain.

There was a consultation. On a sudden a great chorus of exultant cries rang out, and the band scattered, shaking fists and weapons, preparing for a tentative charge.

Ere I could stop her, my lady had sprung upright, to mount upon a rock, and, all in view, to hold an open hand above her head. The sunshine glinted upon her hair. A fugitive little breeze bound her shabby gown closer about her slender figure.

They had seen her instantly. Another chorus of cries burst out, this time in astonishment. A dozen guns were leveled, covering her and our nest, while every visage stared. But no shot belched; thank God, no shot, with me powerless to prevent, just as I was powerless to intercept her!

The chief rode forward, at a walk, his hand likewise lifted.

"Keep down! Keep down, please," she directed to me, while she stood motionless. "Let me try!"

The chief neared until we could see his every lineament and every item of his trappings, even to the black-tipped eagle feather erect at the part in his braids. He rode

carelessly, fearlessly, to halt within easy speaking distance. There he sat a moment, with his rifle across his legged thighs and the folds of his scarlet blanket.

He was a splendid man, naked from the waist up, his coppery chest pigment-daubed, his sinewy arms braceleted with metal, his eyes devouring her so covetously that I felt the gloating thoughts behind them.

He called inquiringly—a greeting and a demand in one, it sounded. She replied. What they two said, in word and sign, I could not know; but all the time I held my revolver upon him, until to my relief he abruptly wheeled his horse and cantered back to his men, leaving me with wrist aching and heart pounding madly.

She stepped lightly down and answered my querying look.

"It's all right. I'm going, and so are you," she said with a faint smile, oddly subtle—a tremulous smile in a white face.

About her there was a mystery which alarmed me. It made me sit up, chilled, to eye her and accuse.

"Where? We are free, you mean? What's the bargain?"

"I go to them. You go where you choose—to the stage road, of course. I have his promise."

This brought me to my feet, rigid, and more than scandalized, for no word can express the shock.

"You go to them? And then where?"

She spoke calmly, flushing a little, smiling a little, her eyes sincere.

"It's the best way and the only way. We shall neither of us be harmed now. The chief will provide for me, and you are free. No, no!" she said, checking my first indignant cry. "Really I don't mind. The Indians are about the only persons left to me. I shall be safe with them." She laughed rather sadly, but brightened. "I don't know but that I prefer them to the whites. I told you I had no place to go; and this saves you also, you see. I got you into it—I've felt that you blamed me, almost hated me; so it's up to me to make good. You can go home, and I shall not be unhappy, I think. Please believe that. The wife of a great chief is quite a personage, and he won't inquire into my past. But if we try to stay here you will certainly be killed, and I shall suffer, and we shall gain nothing. You must take my money—please do! Then good-by. I told him I would come out, under his promise."

She and the rocks seemed to reel together, for my eyes were giddy with a rush of blood, surging and hot.

"Never, never, never!" I was shouting, ignoring her hand. How she had misjudged me! What a shame she had put upon me! I could not credit it. "You shall not—I tell you you sha'n't! I won't have it—it's monstrous, preposterous! Wherever we go, we'll go together. We'll stand them off! Then, if they can take us, let 'em. You make a coward of me—a dastard. You've no right to. I'd rather die!"

"Listen," she chided, her hand grasping my sleeve. "They would take me anyway—don't you see? They would kill you first. What can you do, with one arm, and a revolver, and an unlucky woman? No, Mr. Beeson"—she was firm and strangely formal—"the cards are faced up. I have closed a good bargain for both of us. When you are out, you need say nothing. Perhaps some day I may be ransomed, should I wish to be; but we can talk no further now. He is impatient. The money—you will need the money, and I shall not. Please turn your back, and I'll get at my belt. Why," she laughed, "how well everything is coming out! You are disposed of, I am disposed of—"

"Money!" I roared. "God in heaven! You disposed of? I disposed of? And my honor, madam—what of that?"

"And what of mine, Mr. Beeson?" She stamped her foot, coloring. "Will you turn your back, or—oh, we've talked too long! But the belt you shall have. Here!" She fumbled within her gown. "And now, *adios* and good luck!"

The chief was advancing, accompanied by a warrior. Behind him his men waited expectant, gathered like an ugly blotch upon the dun desert.

Her honor? The word had double meaning. Should she sacrifice the one honor in this crude essay to maintain the other—which she had not lost, to my now opened eyes? I could not deliver her tender body over to that painted swaggerer, any more than I could have delivered it over to Daniel himself.

At last I knew, I knew! History had written me a fool and a cad, but it should not write me a dastard. We were together, and together we should always be, come weal or wo, life or death.

The money belt had been dropped at my feet. She had turned. I leaped before her,

thrust her to the rear, answered the hail of the pausing chief.

"No!" I squalled, and added for emphasis: "You go to hell!"

He understood. The phrase might have been familiar English to him. I saw him stiffen in his saddle. He called loudly, and raised his rifle, threatening.

With a gasp and a choked word of farewell she darted by me, running on for the open and for the Indian chief. She and he filled all my landscape. In a stark blinding rage of fear, chagrin, and rancorous jealousy, I leveled my revolver and pulled trigger, but not at her, though even that was not beyond me in the crisis.

The bullet thwacked smartly. The chief uttered a terrible cry, his rifle was tossed high, he bowed and swayed downward. His comrade grabbed him, and in an instant they were racing back side by side. My lady was running back to me, while the warriors were shrieking and brandishing their weapons, and bullets were spitting against the rocks—all this while yet my hand shook to the recoil of the revolver and the smoke wafted from the muzzle.

What had I done? But done it was.

XX

SHE arrived breathless, distraught, instantly to drag me down beside her, from where I stood stupidly defiant.

"Keep out of sight!" she panted. "Oh, why did you do it? Why did you? I think you killed him—they'll never forgive us. They'll call it treachery. You're lost, lost!"

"But he sha'n't have you," I gabbled. "Let them kill me if they can. Till then you're mine—mine! Don't you understand? I want you!"

"I don't understand," she faltered. She turned a frightened face upon me. "You should have let me go. Nothing can save you now—not even I. You've ruined the one chance you had. I wonder why! It was my own choice—you had no hand in it, and it was my own chance, too." Her voice broke, her eyes welled piteously. "But you fired on him!"

"That was the only answer left me," I said. "You misjudged me, you shamed me. I tell you—"

Her lips slightly curled.

"Misjudged you? Shamed you? Was that all? You've misjudged and shamed me for so long!"

She was interrupted by a renewed burst of savage hoots. "They're coming!"

She knelt up, to peer; I peered. The Indians had deployed, leaving the chief lying upon the ground, their fierce countenances glaring at our asylum. How clear their figures were, in the sunshine, limned against the pulsant, yellowish sand, under the peaceful blue!

"They'll surround us. I might parley for myself, but I can do nothing for you!"

"Parley, then," I bade. "Save yourself, any way you can."

She drew in, whitening as if I had struck her.

"And you accuse me of having misjudged you! I save myself—merely myself? What do you intend to do—fight?"

"As long as you are with me—and after. They'll never take me alive; and take you they shall not if I can prevent it. Damn them, if they get you I mean to make them pay for you! You're all I have!"

"You'd rather I'd stay? You need me? Could I help?"

"Need you?" I groaned. "I'm just finding out, too late!"

"And help? How? Quick! Could I?"

"By staying; by not surrendering yourself—your honor, my honor; by saying that you'd rather stay with me, for life, for death, here, anywhere—after I've said that I'm not deaf, blind, dumb, ungrateful. I love you! I'd rather die for you than live without you!"

A glory glowed in her haggard face and shone from her brimming eyes.

"We will fight, we will fight!" she chanted. "Now I shall not leave you. Oh, my man! Had you kissed me last night, we would have known this longer. We have so little time!" She turned from my lips. "Not now. They're coming! Fight first; and at the end, then kiss me, please, and we'll go together!"

Furious yells from the world outside vibrated amid our rocks. The Sioux all were in motion, except the prostrate figure of the chief. Straight onward they charged, at headlong gallop, to ride over us like a grotesquely tinted wave. The dull drumming of their ponies' hoofs beat a diapason to the shrill clamor of their voices. It was enough to cow, but she spoke steadily.

"You must fire," she said. "Hurry! Fire once, maybe twice, to split them. I don't think they'll rush us, yet."

So I rose farther on my knees and fired,

once and again, pointblank at them with the heavy revolver. It worked a miracle. Every mother's son of them fell flat upon his pony. They all swooped to right and to left, as if the bullets had cleft them apart in the center; and while I gaped, wondering, they swept past at long range, half on either flank, pelting in bullet and near-spent arrow.

She forced me down.

"Low, low!" she warned. "They'll circle. They hold their scalps dearly. We can only wait. That was three. You have fifteen shots left, for them; then one for me, one for you. You understand?"

"I understand," I replied. "And if I'm disabled—"

She answered quietly.

"It will be the same. One for you, one for me!"

The circle had been formed—a double circle, to move in two directions, a scudding ring reversed within a scudding ring, the bowmen outermost. Around and around they galloped, yelling, gibing, taunting, shooting so malignantly that the air was in a constant hum and swish. The lead whined and smacked, the shafts streaked and clattered.

"Are you sorry I shot the chief?" I asked.

Amid the confusion my blood was coursing evenly, and I was not afraid. Of what avail was fear?

"I'm glad, glad!" she proclaimed.

With sudden movement she was gone, bending low, then crawling, then whisking from sight. Had she abandoned me, after all? Had she—no! God be thanked, here she came back, flushed and triumphant, a canteen in her hand.

"The mules might break," she explained, short of breath. "This canteen is full. We'll need it. The other mule is frantic. I couldn't touch him."

At the moment I thought how wise and brave and beautiful she was. Mine for the hour, here—and after? Montoyo should never have her—not in life or in death!

"You must stop some of those fiends from sneaking closer," she counseled. "See, they're trying us out!"

More and more frequently some one of the scurrying enemy veered sharply, tore in toward us, hanging upon the farther side of his horse, boldly jerked erect, and shot. Then, with a swift turn of his mount, he was away, whooping.

I had been desperately saving the ammunition, to eke out this hour of mine with her. Every note from the revolver summoned the end a little nearer; but we had our game to play, though the end was certain.

When the next painted ruffian—a burly fellow in a flannel-fringed cotton shirt, with flaunting crimson tassels on his pony's mane—bore down, I guessed shrewdly, arose, and let him have it.

She cried out, clapping her hands.

"Good! Good!"

The pony was sprawling and kicking; the rider had hurtled free, and went jumping and dodging like a jack-rabbit.

"To the right! Watch!"

Again I needs must fire, driving the rascals aside with the report of the revolver. That was five. Not sparing my wounded arm, I hastily reloaded, for the hammer had rested over an empty chamber. I filled the cylinder.

"They're killing the mules," she said; "but we can't help it."

The two mules were snorting and plunging; their hoofs rang against the rocks. Some of the Sioux had dismounted to the rear, and were shooting carefully. There was an exultant shout—one mule had broken loose. He galloped out, wounded and reddened, stirrups swinging, canteen bouncing, right into the waiting line; and down he lunged, abristle with feathered points launched into him with sheer spiteful joy.

The firing was resumed. We heard the other mule scream with a note indescribable; we heard him flounder and kick; and again the savages yelled.

Now they all charged recklessly from the four sides; and I had to stand and fire, right, left, before, behind, emptying the gun once more ere they scattered and fled. I sensed her fingers twitching at my belt, extracting fresh cartridges.

We sank down, breathing hard. Her eyes were wide, and bluer than the deepest summer sea; her face was aflame; her hair shone like purest gold—and upon her shoulder there was a challenging oriflamme of scarlet, staining a rent in the faded calico.

"You're hurt!" I blurted, aghast.

"Not much—a scratch. Don't mind it. And you?"

"I'm not touched."

"Load, sir. But I think we shall have a

little space. How many left? Nine." She had been counting. "Seven for them!"

"Seven for them," I acknowledged.

I tucked home the loads; the six-shooter was ready.

"Now let them come!" she murmured.

"Let them come!" I echoed.

We looked one upon the other, and smiled. It was not so bad, this place, our minds having been made up to it. In fact, there was something sweet. Our present was assured; we faced a future together, at least; we were in accord.

The Sioux had retired, to sit dismounted in close circle, for a confab. Occasionally a young brave, a vedette, exuberantly galloped toward us, dared us, shook hand and weapon at us, no doubt spat at us, and gained nothing by his brag.

"What will they do next?" I asked.

"I don't know," said she. "We shall see, though!"

So we lay, gazing, not speaking. The sun streamed down, flattening the desert with his fervent beams until the uplifts cringed low and on the horizon the mountain peaks floated languidly upon waves of heat. In all this vast theater, from horizon to horizon, there were only my lady and I, and the beleaguering Sioux. It seemed unreal, a fantasy!

The rocks began to smell scorched, a sudden thirst nagged, and my wounded arm pained with weariness, as if to remind me that I was here in the body. Yes, and here was my lady, too, in the flesh, as much as I, for she stirred, glanced at me, and smiled. I heard her, saw her, felt her presence. I placed my hand over hers.

"What is it?" she queried.

"Nothing. I wanted to make sure."

"Of yourself?"

"Of you, of me—of everything."

"There can be no doubt," she said. "I wish there might, for your sake."

"No," I thickly answered. "If you were only out of it! If we could find some way!"

"I'd rather be here with you," said she.

"And I with you, then," I replied.

The thought of water obsessed me. She must have read it, for she inquired:

"Aren't you thirsty?"

"Are you?"

"Yes. Why don't we drink?"

"Should we?"

"Why not? We might as well be as comfortable as we can."

She reached for the canteen, which lay in a fast-dwindling strip of shade among the rocks. We drank sparingly. She let me dribble a few drops upon her shoulder. Thenceforth, by silent agreement, we moistened our tongues, scrupulously turn about, wringing the most from each brief sip as if testing the bouquet of precious wine. Came a time when we regretted this frugality; but just now there persisted within us, I suppose, that germ of hope which seems to be nourished by the soul.

The Sioux had counceled and decided. They faced us in the manner they had determined. We waited, tense and watchful.

Without even a premonitory shout, a pony bolted out from their huddle and dashed at us. He bore two riders, naked to the sun, save for breech-clouts. They charged straight in.

At her mystified, alarmed murmur I was holding on them as best I could, my finger crooked against the trigger, coaxing it, praying for luck, when the rear rider dropped to the ground and dived headlong, worming into a little hollow of the sand, where he lay half concealed.

The pony had wheeled to a shrill, jubilant chorus. His remaining rider lashed him in retreat, leaving the first digging lustily with hand and knife.

That was the system, then—an approach by rushes.

"We mustn't permit it," she breathed. "We must rout him out—we must keep them all out, or they'll get where they can pick you off. Can you reach him?"

"I'll try," said I.

The tawny figure, prone upon the tawny sand, was just visible, lean and snakish, slightly oscillating as it worked. I took careful aim, and fired, and saw the spurt from the bullet.

"A little lower—oh, just a little lower!" she pleaded.

The same courier was in leash, posted to bring another fellow. All the Sioux were gazing, statuesque, to watch my marksmanship. I fired again.

"Too low!" she muttered.

Quickly, with a curse, I tried once more. She cried out joyfully. The snake had flopped from its hollow, plunged aside at full length; had started to crawl, writhing, dragging its hinder parts.

With a swoop the pony arrived, before we noted it. Another Indian plumped into the hollow; while the courier, bending over in

his swift circle, snatched the wounded snake from the ground and sped back with him.

The Sioux seized upon the moment of stress. They cavorted, scouring hither and thither, yelling, shooting. Once more our battered haven seethed with the hum and hiss and rebound of lead and shaft.

That, and my eagerness, told. The fellow in the foreground burrowed cleverly; he submerged farther and farther by rapid inches. I fired twice, but we could not see that I had even inconvenienced him.

My lady clutched my revolver arm.

"No! Wait!"

Her tone rang dismayed. Trembling, blinded with heat and powder smoke, and heart-sick, I paused, to fumble and to reload the almost emptied cylinder.

"I can't reach him," said I. "He's too far in."

Her voice answered gently.

"No matter, dear. You're firing too hastily. Please rest a minute, and drink. You can bathe your eyes. It's hard, shooting across the hot sand. They'll bring others. We've no need to save water, you know."

"I know," I admitted.

We niggardly drank; I dabbled my burning eyes and cleared my sight. Of the fellow in the rifle-pit there was no living taken. The Sioux had ceased their gambols. They sat steadfast, again anticipative. A stillness, menacing and brooding, weighted the landscape.

She sighed.

"Well?"

The pregnant truce oppressed us. What was hatching out now?

I cautiously shifted my posture, to stretch and scan. Instinctively I groped for the canteen, to wet my lips again.

A puff of smoke burst from the hollow. The canteen clinked, flew from my hand, and went clattering among the rocks.

"Oh!" she cried, aghast. "But you're not hurt? I saw him. He'll come up again in a moment. Be ready!"

The Sioux in the background were shrieking. They had accounted for our mules; by a chance shot they had nipped our water. Yet neither event affected us as they seemed to think it should. Mules and water were inconsequential in the long run—which was due to be short, at most. We husbanded other relief in our keeping.

Suddenly, as I craned, the fellow fired

again. He was a good shot, and had discovered a niche in our rampart, for the ball fanned my cheek with the wings of a vicious wasp. On the instant I replied, snapping a quick answer.

"I don't think you hit him," she said. "Let me try. It may change the luck. You're tired. I'll hold on the spot—he'll come up in the same place, head and shoulders. You'll have to tempt him. Are you afraid, sir?"

She smiled upon me as she took the gun.

"But if he kills me?" I faltered.

"What of that?" she asked.

"You!"

"I?" Her face filled. "I should not be long."

She adjusted the revolver to a crevice a little removed from me.

"They will be hunting you, not me," she said.

She crouched behind the rock, peering earnestly out, intent upon the hollow. I edged farther and farther, as if seeking for a mark, but with all my flesh prickling and my breath coming fast—like any man, I assert, who forces himself to invite the striking capabilities of a rattlesnake.

Abruptly it came—so venomous a strike that it stung my face and scalded my eyes with the spatter of sandstone and hot lead. At the same moment her revolver bellowed into my ears, thunderous because unexpected. I could not see; I only heard an utterance that was cheer and sob in one.

"I got him! Are you hurt? Are you hurt?"

"No! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah, dear!"

The air rocked with the shouts of the Sioux—shouts never before so welcome in their import, for they were shouts of rage and disappointment. They gave me new vigor, and cleared away the daze of the bullet impact. Upon the low parapet of the hollow I saw a dull shade where no shade should naturally be, garnished with crimson. The Indian had doubled forward, reflexing to the blow. He was dead, stone dead, his crafty spirit issued upon the red trail of a ball through his brain.

"Thank God!" I rejoiced.

She had sunk back wearily.

"That is the last," she said.

"Won't they try again, you think?"

She gravely surveyed me.

"The last spare shot, I mean. We have only our two left. We must save those."

"Yes, we must save those," I asserted.

The realization broke across a momentary hiatus, and brought me down from the false heights to face it with her. A dizzy space had opened before me. I knew that she moved aside.

"Look!" she cried.

It was the canteen, drained dry by a jagged rent from the sharpshooter's lead.

"No matter, dear," she said.

"No matter," said I.

The subject was not worth pursuing.

"We have discouraged their game again," she said. "In case they rush us—"

"In case they rush us—" I repeated.

"We can wait a little, and see."

XXI

THE Sioux had quieted. They let the hollow alone, tenanted as it was with death; and for us there was a satisfaction in that tribute to our defense. Quite methodically, and with cruel show of leisure, they distributed themselves by knots, in a half-encircling string around our asylum. They posted a mounted sentry as a lookout. Lolling upon the bare ground in the sun glare, they chatted, laughed, rested, but never for an instant were we dismissed from their eyes and thoughts.

"They will wait, too. They can afford it," she murmured. "It is cheaper for them than losing lives."

"If they knew we had only the two cartridges—"

"They don't, yet."

"And they will find out too late," I hazarded.

"Yes, too late. We shall have time!"

Her voice did not waver; it heartened with its vengeful, determined sound.

Occasionally an Indian invoked us by brandishing arm or weapon in surety of hate and in promise of fancied reprisal. What fools they were! Now and again a warrior galloped upon the back trail, and returned gleefully, perhaps to flourish an army canteen at us.

"There probably is water where we heard the frogs last night," she remarked.

"I'm glad we didn't try to reach it, for our camp," said I.

"So am I," said she. "We might have run right into them. We are better here—at least I am."

"And I," I confirmed.

Strangely enough we seemed to have little to say, in this precious doldrums where

we were becalmed, between the distant past and the unlogged future. We had not a particle of shade, not a trace of coolness. The sun was high, all our rocky recess was a furnace, fairly reverberant with the heat. The flies—I vaguely pondered upon how they had existed previously, and whence they had gathered—buzzed briskly, attracted by the dead mule. We lay tolerably bolstered, without much movement; and as the Sioux were not firing upon us, we might wax careless of their espionage.

Her eyes, untroubled, scarcely left my face; I feared to let mine leave hers. Of what she was thinking I might not know, and I did not seek to know. I was oddly content, for our decisions had been made. And still the situation was unreal, impossible. We, in this guise; the Sioux, watching; the desert, waiting; death hovering—a sudden death, a violent death, suspended in sight like the Dionysian sword, with the single hair already frayed by the greedy shears of fate. A snap, at our own signal; then presto, change!

It simply could not be true! Why, somewhere my father and mother busied, with no thought of all this; somewhere Benton roared, with no memory of us; somewhere the wagon-train toiled on, with no care for us. The stage road missed us not, nor wondered. The railroad graders shoveled and scraped and picked as blithely as if the same desert did not contain them and us. Cities throbbed, people worked and played, and we were of as little concern to them now as we would be a year hence.

Then it all pridefully resolved to this, like the warming tune of a fine battle chant—that I was here, with my woman, my partner woman, the much-desired woman whom I had won. Yes, I had won her—which was more than Daniel, or Montoyo, or the Indian chief, or the wide world of other men, could boast.

She spoke musingly.

"I did make up to you, at first," she said; "in Omaha, and on the train."

"Did you?" I smiled, for she was childishly frank.

"But that was only passing. Then in Benton I knew you were different. I wondered what it was; but you were different from anybody that I had met before. There's always such a moment in a woman's life."

I soberly nodded. Nothing could be a platitude in such a place and such an hour.

"I wished to help you. Do you believe that now?"

"I believe you, dear heart," I assured.

"But it was partly because I thought you could help me," she said, like a confession. "I had nothing wrong in mind. You were to be a friend, not a lover. I had no need of lovers—no, no!"

We were silent for an interval. Again she spoke.

"Do you care anything about my family? I suppose not. It doesn't matter, here; but you wouldn't be ashamed of them. I ran away with Montoyo. I thought he was something else. How could I go home after that? I tried to be true to him. We had plenty of money, and he was kind to me at first, but he dragged me down, and my father and mother don't know even yet. Yes, I tried to help him, too. I stayed. It's a life that gets into one's blood. I feared him terribly, in time. He was a devil—a gentleman devil!" She referred in the past tense, as to some fact definitely bygone. "What else could I do, or where could I go? So many people knew me." She smiled. "Suddenly I tied to you, sir. I seemed to feel—I took the chance."

"Thank God you did!" I said.

"But I would not have wronged myself, or you, or him," she eagerly pursued. "I never did wrong him." She flushed. "No man can convict me. You hurt me when you refused me, dear; it told me that you didn't understand. Then I was desperate. I had been shamed before you, and by you. You were going, and not understanding, and I couldn't let you; so I followed you to the wagon-train. You were my star. I wonder why! I felt that you'd get me out—you see, I was so madly selfish, like a drowning person. I clutched at you; I might have put you under while climbing up myself."

"We have climbed together," said I. "You have made me into a man!"

"But I forced myself on you. I played you against Daniel. I foresaw that you might have to kill him, to rid me of him. You were my weapon, and I used you. Do you blame me that I used you?"

"Daniel and I were destined to meet, just as you and I were destined to meet," said I. "I had to prove myself on him. It would have happened anyway. Had I not stood up to him, you would not have loved me."

"That was not the price," she sighed. "Maybe you don't understand yet. I'm so afraid you don't understand," she pleaded. "At the last I had resigned you. I would have left you free. I saw how you felt; but, oh, it happened just the same! We were fated, and you showed you hated me."

"I never hated you. I was perplexed. That was a part of love," said I.

"You mean it? You are holding nothing back?" she asked anxiously.

"I am holding nothing back," I answered; "as you will know, I think, in time to come."

Again we reclined, silent, at peace—a strange peace of mind and body, to which the demonstrations by the waiting Sioux were alien things.

"Are we very guilty, do you think?" she said presently.

"In what, dearest?"

"In this, here. I am already married, you know."

"That is another life," I reasoned. "It was long ago and under different law."

"But if we went back into it—if we escaped?"

"Then we should—but let's not talk of that!"

"Then you should forget, and I should return to Benton," she said. "I have decided. I should return to Benton, where Montoyo is, and maybe find another way. I would not live with him—never, never! I should ask him to release me."

"I with you," I informed. "We should go together, and do what was best."

"You would? You wouldn't be ashamed or afraid?"

"Ashamed or afraid of what?"

She cried out happily, and shivered.

"I hope we don't have to. He might kill you. Yes, I hope we don't have to. Do you mind?"

I shook my head, smiling my response. There were tears in her eyes, repaying me.

Our conversation became more fitful. Hours sped, I don't know how, except that we were in a kind of lethargy, taking no note of time and hanging fast to this our respite from the tempestuous past.

Once she dreamily murmured, apropos of nothing, yet apropos of much:

"We must be about the same age. I am not old—not really very old."

"I am twenty-five," I answered.

"So I thought," she mused.

Then, later, as if she had been revolving

this idea also, she said with a certain triumph:

"I'm glad we drank water while we could! Aren't you?"

"You were so wise," I praised.

I felt sorry for her cracked lips. It is astonishing with what swiftness, upon the dry desert, amid the dry air, under the dry, burning sun, thirst quickens into a consuming fire scorching from within outward to the skin.

Again we lapsed into silence, playing the game with the Sioux and steadily viewing each other.

"Where will you shoot me, Frank?" she asked casually.

This bared the secret heart of me.

"No! No!" I begged. "Don't speak of that! It will be bad enough at the best. I don't know how I can do it!"

"You will, though," she soothed. "I'd rather have it from you. You must be brave, for yourself and for me; and kind, and quick. I think it should be through the temple—that's sure; but you won't wait, to look, will you? You'll spare yourself that?"

This made me groan, craven, and wipe my hand across my forehead to brush away the frenzy. My fingers came free damp with cold, sticky sweat—a prodigy of a parchment skin which puzzled me.

We had not exchanged a caress, save by voice; had not again touched each other. Sometimes I glanced at the Sioux, but not for long; I dreaded to lose sight of her by so much as a moment.

The Indians remained virtually as from the beginning of their vigil. They sat secure, drank, probably ate, with time their ally. They sat judicial and persistent, as if depending upon the progress of a slow fuse, or upon the workings of a poison—which indeed was the case.

Thirst and heat tortured us unceasingly. The sun had passed the zenith—this sun of a culminating summer, throughout which he had thrived regal and lustful. It seemed ignoble of him that he should stoop to torment us, and one of us a small woman. There was all his boundless domain for him; but stoop he did, burning nearer and nearer.

She broke out with sudden passion of hoarse appeal.

"Why do we wait? Why not now?"

"We ought to wait," I stammered, miserable and pitying.

"Yes," she whispered, submissive. "I suppose we ought. But I am so tired! I think," she said, "that I will let my hair down. I shall go with my hair down. I have a right to, at the last."

Whereupon she fell to loosening her hair and braiding it with hurried fingers.

"We'll not be much longer, dear," I said, after a time.

"I hope not," said she, panting, her lips stiff, her eyes bright and feverish. "They'll rush us at sundown—maybe before."

"I believe," said I, blurring the words, for my tongue was getting unmanageable, "they're making ready now."

She exclaimed and struggled and sat up, and we both gazed. Out there the Sioux, in that world of their own, had aroused to energy. I fancied that they had wearied of inaction. At any rate they were upon their feet, several were upon their horses, and others mounted hastily. Squad joined squad, as if by summons; and here came their outpost scout, galloping in, his blanket streaming from one hand like a banner of an Islam prophet.

They delayed an instant, gesticulating.

"It will be soon," she whispered, touching my arm. "When they are half-way, don't fail. I trust you. Will you kiss me? That is, only the once."

I kissed her; dry cracked lips met dry cracked lips. She laid herself down, closed her eyes, and smiled.

"I'm all right," she said. "I'm tired. I've worked so hard, for only this! You mustn't look."

"And you must wait for me, somewhere," I entreated. "Just a moment!"

"Of course," she sighed.

The Sioux charged, shrieking, hammering, lashing, all of one purpose. We two were that purpose—my lady and I, my life and her body.

Quickly kneeling beside her—I was cool and firm and collected—I felt her hand guide the revolver barrel; but I did not look. She had forbidden.

I kept my eyes upon the Indians until they were half-way. Then in exultation I pulled the trigger, my hand already tensed to snatch and cock and work my own deliverance under their very grasp. That was a sweetness!

The hammer clicked. There had been no jar, no report. The hammer had only clicked, I tell you, shocking me to the core. A missed cartridge? An empty chamber?

Which? No matter. I should achieve for her, first—then for myself.

I heard her gasp. They were very near. How they shouted, how the bullets and arrows spat and hissed!

I had cocked the gun, she had clutched it, when, looking through them, agonized and blinded as I was—looking through them as if they were fantoms—I sensed another sound and saw another sight.

Then I wrested the revolver from her. I fired pointblank, and fired again—the revolver did not fail. They swept by, hooting, jostling; they thudded on. Rising, I screeched and waved, as grotesque, no doubt, as any animated scarecrow.

I had heard a trumpet note. I had seen a cavalry guidon coming toward us and a rank of bobbing figures galloping, galloping over an imperceptible swell.

"You didn't do it!" she cried to me, from my feet. "You didn't do it!"

"We're saved!" I shouted. "Hurrah! We're saved. The soldiers are here!"

Again the trumpet pealed, lilting silvery. She tottered up, clinging to me. She stared. She released me, and to my gladly questing gaze her face was very white, her eyes struggling for comprehension, like those of one awakened from a dream.

"I must go back to Benton," she faltered. "I shall never get away!"

We stood mute while the bluecoats raced on with hearty cheers and brave clank of saber and canteen. We were sitting composedly when the lieutenant scrambled to us, among our rocks. The troopers followed, curiously scanning.

The officer's stubbled red face, dust-smear, queried us keenly; so did his curt voice.

"Just in time?"

"In time," I croaked. "Water! For her—for me!"

There was a canteen apiece. We sucked.

"You are the two from the Mormon wagon-train?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. You know?" I returned.

"We came on as fast as we could. The Sioux are raiding again. You had a narrow squeak, sir," he told us. "You were crazy to try it—you and a woman, alone. We'll take you along as soon as my Pawnees get in from chasing those beggars."

Distant whoops from a pursuit drifted in to us, out of the desert.

"Captain Adams sent you?" I inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"I will go back," I agreed. "I will go back, but there's no need of Mrs. Montoyo doing so. If you could see her safely landed at a stage station, and for Benton—"

"We'll land you both. I have to report at Bridger. The train is all right. It has an escort to Bitter Creek."

"I can overtake it, or join it," said I; "but the lady goes to Benton."

"Yes, yes," he snapped. "That's nothing to me, of course. You'll do better to wait for the train at Bridger, Mr.—I don't believe I have your name."

"Beeson," I informed him, astonished.

"And the lady's? Your sister? Wife?"

"Mrs. Montoyo," I told him. "Mrs. Montoyo, from Benton," I repeated, that there should be no misunderstanding. "No relative, sir."

He passed it over, as a gentleman should.

"Well, Mr. Beeson, you have business with the train?"

"I have business with Captain Adams, and he with me, as you probably know," I replied. "Since he sent you, I shall consider myself under arrest; but I will return of my own free will as soon as Mrs. Montoyo is safe."

"Under arrest—for what?" he asked.

"For killing that man, sir—Captain Adams's son. But I was forced to it—I did it in self-defense. I should not have left, and I am ready to face the matter whenever possible."

"Oh!" said he, with a shrug, tossing the idea aside. "I did hear something about that, from some of my men, but nothing from Adams. You didn't kill him, I understand—merely laid him out. I saw him myself, but I didn't ask questions. So you can rest easy on that score. His old man seemed to have no grudge against you. Fact is, he scarcely allowed me time to warn him of the Sioux before he told me that you and a woman were out, and were liable to lose your scalps, if nothing worse. I think," the lieutenant added, narrowing upon me, "that you'll find those Mormons are as just as any other set in a show-down. The lad, I gathered from the talk, drew on you after he'd cried quits." He turned hastily. "You spoke, madam? Anything wanted?"

The trumpeter orderly plucked me by the sleeve. He was a squat, sun-scorched little man, and his red-rimmed blue eyes squinted at me with painful interest. He

whispered harshly from behind his bronzed hand.

"Beg your pardon, sorr. Mrs. Montoyo, be it—that lady?"

"Yes."

"From Benton City, sorr, ye say?"

"From Benton City."

"Sure, I know the name. It's the name of a gambler the vigilantes strung up last week. I was there to see."

I heard a gusty sigh, an exclamation from the lieutenant. My lady had fainted again.

"The reaction, sir," I apologized, to the lieutenant, as we worked.

"Naturally," answered he. "You'll both go back to Benton?"

"Certainly," said I.

XXII

It was six weeks later, with my lady recovered and myself long since healed, and with Fort Bridger pleasant in our memories, when we two rode into Benton once more, by horse, from the nearest stage point. Here we sat our saddles, silent, wondering; for of Benton there was little significant of the past, little tangible of the present, naught promising of its future.

Roaring Benton City had vanished, you might say, utterly. The iron tendrils of the Pacific Railroad glistened, stretching westward into the sunset, and Benton had followed the lure, to Rawlins, to Green River, to Bryan—and already still onward, perhaps, for the track was traveling fast, charging the mountain slopes of Utah.

The restless dust had settled. The Queen Hotel, the Big Tent, the rows of canvas, plank, tin, sheet-metal, what-not stores, saloons, gambling-dens, dance-halls, human habitations—the blatant street and the station itself had subsided into a skeleton company of hacked and withered posts, a fantastic outcrop of cold and blackened clay chimneys, a sprinkling of battered cans. The fevered populace who had ridden high upon the tide of rapid life had remained only as ghosts haunting a potter's field, and the turmoil had dwindled to a coyote's yap, mocking the twilight.

"It all, all is wiped out, as he is," she said; "but I wished to see."

"All, all is wiped out," said I.

Through star-shine we cantered side by side eastward down the old, empty freighting road, for the railway-station at Fort Steele.

THE END

The Blind God

THE STRANGE STORY OF THE HIDDEN JEWELS OF ABDUL SINDH

By Owen Oliver

"YOU and I, Mr. Yates," said the raja, "are men of the European world; and I, perhaps, am more European than you. I was deliberately bred to be European. I had a Scottish nurse, an Irish governess, and an English tutor, before I was sent to Eton and Cambridge. I was taught that the religion, the traditions, and the superstitions of my country belonged to a lower stage of civilization, and I must rise above them—higher above them than even my father had risen, and he was reckoned the most English prince in India. You had no such warning against the influence of India. It is a subtle influence, and you have lived here for five years, you tell me. There may be an unconscious tinge of Eastern mystery in your thoughts."

"If there is a tinge," replied Yates, "it is in my feelings. Environment does color them, you know."

"Color feelings," said the raja, "and you color the whole man; but you and I are European in our judgment. We laugh at the religions and superstitions of India, and do not believe them. And yet"—he leaned forward earnestly—"some things which we do not believe are true even to-day, and many things which are not true to-day *were* true. East is West in our time, Mr. Yates; but once it was East. It was very East when my ancestor, Abdul Sindh, hid the treasure which you have come to seek."

Yates turned on his couch, as if he moved to ease a cramped arm; but his hand found the butt of a little revolver in his pocket. He could not escape if the raja was sufficiently Eastern to design his death; but he could shoot the raja first, and he would. He was that kind of man.

"Treasure?" he asked in a surprised tone, and blew a smoke ring.

"Why else should you come here?" the raja smiled. "Why else hide from me in the tree, when I am so notoriously European and a good host to your countrymen? Let us agree that you came for the treasure, and save our breath."

Yates sat up slowly on the couch. He had the little revolver firmly in his hand now, and a turn of the wrist would bring it out of his pocket. With just one-tenth of a second to aim and fire, he could back himself to pip an ace at twenty yards.

"Well," he observed languidly, "whatever brought me, it was very lucky for your highness that I was there in the tree when you missed the tiger with both barrels!"

"Pardon me," the raja protested. "I do not miss. The bullets had been removed from the cartridges."

"The deuce they had! Well, in plain European English, if you suspect me of having a hand in the business, you're wrong."

The raja laughed.

"No, no! I do not suspect you. And you need not suspect me. Do not fumble in your pocket. If I had meant you harm, it would be done. A dozen sure rifles would cover you from the curtains of this room. They do not. There is no one within sound, and I am unarmed. I know very well who removed the cartridges, and why. That account is settled—in true European fashion."

"Umph!" Yates grunted. "Perhaps you are *not* so European as I, raja."

"You shall judge. It was the girl with the green necklace who brought in the coffee. I had taken a little notice of her—had jested and touched the dimple on her chin; and she had the queer taste to prefer her lover—he is a water-carrier—to her raja. A commendable taste, but unusual."

"Poor little devil!" said Yates.

"You are mistaken," the raja assured him. "I am steeped in the sentiment of Europe. Also, the girl really did not matter two straws to me. Observe the order of progression. Abdul Sindh would have had her killed with torture; my grandfather would have had her killed without torture; my father would have had her whipped. I merely told her to marry the dirty scamp she loved, and promoted him to be my deputy chief water-carrier. There is no oriental cruelty lurking in my mind for them—or for you. I give you my European word of honor, which I learned at Eton; so you need not play with the revolver in your pocket."

Yates drew his hand sharply from his dress jacket.

"I was a fool, sir," he said frankly. "I trust you, and—excuse me—I like you; but I'm hanged if I can see what you're driving at!"

"The first point I wish to make," the raja explained, "is that I like you—as well as it is possible to like a man who has put you under an uncomfortable obligation."

"Oh, that's nothing!" Yates disclaimed. "Every hunter is indebted to another fellow's rifle now and then. Besides, you can easily be quit of the obligation, you know." The raja shook his head. "Since you can't find the treasure, it wouldn't hurt you to let me have a try. Most likely I shouldn't find it, even if it exists."

"It exists," the raja stated. "Oh, yes! Your cigar has gone out. Take another."

Yates selected a cigar carefully, and lit it slowly.

"You really think it exists?" he said.

"I have no doubt of that," the raja assured him. "Abdul Sindh left a very careful and complete record of it. In his very Eastern days he would have lied without scruple to other people; but he would not write death-bed lies to his own descendants. The record was made for them, and when he was dying."

"The record doesn't say exactly where the treasure is, I suppose," Yates suggested.

"On the contrary, it describes the place very precisely. There is a map which indicates the mountain that covers it. A chart marks the path to the opening in the mountainside, and another shows the route through the caves. They were the ante-rooms of an old temple. There is even a plan of the last great cave, which was the temple itself."

"I heard it was in a ruined temple," Yates remarked.

"Did you? The plan indicates the altar under which it is laid. It is the altar of a god that Europe has abandoned. You would not understand his name, and you are not likely to have heard it. There are gods of whom we do not talk. The roots of the word are in an old caste-dialect which has passed away with its caste. They were priests, and tradition credits them with miraculous powers. Our scholars interpret the name as 'the blind god of expiation by blood.' Well, we do not worship him now. Observe that I flouted him and gave the girl her life. That god's day is done, for you and me. We are civilized; but my forests and mountains are not civilized, nor are my bowing and scraping people, who call themselves dust beneath my feet. We believe that dust is dangerous, Mr. Yates. The microbe slays more than the mammoth, for you cannot fight the dust. That is my second point. Civilization has fenced the old things off from us; but if you climb over the fence, they are still there. The treasure is over the fence, Mr. Yates."

"Umph!" said Yates. "You mean that there are still priests to guard it?"

"No. Abdul Sindh wiped out the whole caste. Its guardians are wild beasts, fever and pestilence, and perhaps visions of the old gods—or, as some say, the old gods themselves. You and I do not believe that, of course. The wisdom of Europe believes very little."

"Yes," Yates agreed. "Too little! I have seen some things out here. Hypnotism, perhaps; but—old gods and visions!" He shrugged his big shoulders. "Fever, of course."

"Fever, of course," the raja agreed. "Many have gone to seek the treasure, and they have not returned. Friend, you have saved my life. There are some diamonds still in my treasury, though this famine has taken most of them. It was in England that I was taught the art of ruling, and I feed my people. They have small minds, and they are very dirty. In my heart—bah, you cannot teach the heart! If I were all head—a calculating machine—I might say, 'You saved my life. The treasure lies there useless to me. Go and take it!' You would go, and would hold me quit of my debt; but, my friend, you would not come back, and my heart says that you

saved my life. It was a fine shot—straight through the tiger's left eye; and you hadn't a second to aim. Do you know, the time was too short for me to feel fear. I only thought of clubbing the brute with my rifle."

"Umph!" Yates grunted again. "He might have been mighty sick afterward—might even have died; but it wouldn't have saved you. An old tiger takes a long time to die, and does a lot of killing first."

"So does an old god," said the raja. "His case is very like the tiger's. First we drive the tiger outside the towns; then we drive him outside the villages; and presently we shall drive him off the earth; but it is not yet. Friend Yates, you and I have lived some years out here. You cannot disbelieve in India all that you disbelieve in England. As one English-bred man to another, is it not so?"

"Yes," Yates assented slowly. "Yes! There is more in India than is dreamed of in Europe. Still, I am willing to chance the old gods. I suppose the treasure is pretty large?"

"Judging from Abdul Sindh's list of the jewels, I should judge that it was worth somewhere from two to six million pounds." Yates whistled softly. "My grandfather put the value at five millions; but he was a cautious man, my father always declared, and more likely to underestimate than overestimate."

"What did your grandfather know about the jewels?" Yates inquired.

"He penetrated to the inner cave, saw them, and handled them."

"And did not bring them away!" Yates opened his eyes wide.

"He was very sick with the fever," the raja explained. "He died a day's journey from home. Perhaps they were only the ravings of a delirious man; but my father went out to meet him, and saw the marks upon his skin. They had the shape of finger-prints burned in. My grandfather raved—it was mere raving, of course—that he was forced away by burning hands—hands without bodies."

"Fever," said Yates. "Obviously fever! Well, look here—I'll chance the fever, and the burning hands without bodies, and all the rest. If I get the treasure, you shall have three-quarters and I'll have one-quarter. Is it a bargain?"

The raja shook his head.

"I will not risk it," he refused.

"Why?" Yates cried impatiently. "You risk nothing!"

"Pardon me," the raja corrected. "I risk your life, and you saved mine."

"My life is mine, and it is I who choose to risk it," Yates claimed. "You have played fair, and warned me. You were bound to do that; but you are not bound to save me from the old god of red-blooded folly! I won't run any unnecessary risk. I can take a few good shots with me for the wild beasts, and a doctor for the fever."

The raja shook his head again.

"You may have heard of Colonel Murray's expedition," he suggested. "He took many good shots, and two doctors. None of them returned. That was fifteen years ago. I was not of age. My uncle was regent, and he let them go. He was a foolish man, and afraid to cross the British. They were too strong to cross, he often told me. He did not know their strength so well as I; yet I do not fear to cross them. Their strength is their weakness! They are merciful to the underserving. You smile—because I spared the girl?"

"No," Yates denied. "As to the Murray expedition, I know about it. That was how I came to seek the treasure, for my uncle was the younger doctor. Rifles have been improved since then, and so has the treatment of jungle fever. Medicine has advanced."

"Has it?" The raja smiled. "Diagnosis, yes! They can tell you better what the man died of nowadays; but he dies, all the same. Surgery has made huge strides; but medicine—bah, I would rather have one of our old women treat me for jungle fever than your advanced physicians. Friend Yates, do you think I am the sort of man to be balked of the treasure by wild beasts and fever? Why do I not go?"

"I think," Yates told him, "you are *not* so European as I!"

The raja leaned forward and touched Yates with his sinewy hand.

"I am a stage ahead of you," he claimed in a fierce whisper. "I do not pretend to disbelieve what I do believe. And I am as little a coward as you. Your hand was on your revolver a little while ago. The wrong word, and you would have shot me; and I played with danger just because it was danger. I am no coward, my friend, and I want the treasure as a mouth wants kisses; but I do not go. There are things that you cannot fight with rifles, or with doctors."

Yates nodded slowly.

"You believe in—I will not say old gods—forces in nature that we in the West do not understand," he said. "Yes, perhaps I do. Can't you get some of your people here, who understand those things, to fight the old forces with the old forces?"

The raja shook his head.

"They say," he stated, "that the old gods are stronger than the new. The strongest of the new religions is yours. Perhaps it is strong enough, if it would fight for the treasure; but it will not. It has been tried. There was a missionary-doctor woman came here twelve years ago to seek the treasure. She wanted to get it to put up hospitals for women all over India. You know her kind?"

"Oh, yes!" Yates smiled contemptuously. "Half saint and half lunatic, and wholly unpractical. Your women wouldn't go into the hospitals if they were built!"

"That, of course," the raja remarked, "never occurred to her; but she was clearly a very good woman. I let her go. I thought she might get the treasure. Then she would bring it here, and she would die, and it would be mine."

"You meant to kill her?"

"No, no, no! I do not war on women. You have seen. It is foretold in Abdul Sindh's record that whoever gains the treasure shall bring it here and die."

"But why did you think this missionary lady likely to get it?" Yates asked.

"The record says that treasure which is gained by shedding blood shall be paid for in blood; but that blood which is shed for others may reckon manifold—even to sixteen times."

"I see! You thought she would succeed because she was getting it for others. That's just what I should be doing—three-quarters for you, and half of my quarter for a girl in England."

"For an eighth," the raja calculated, "two lives would be necessary, and I take it that you do not want to pay one. The lady was willing to die for the sake of her hospitals for Indian women that Indian women would not use! I thought she was a saint. Perhaps she was. For she entered the cave—so she said—and she did not die; but in the cave she had a vision which told her that the time had not yet come for the money to serve its appointed use. So she came back and left it, and pestered me to build hospitals. My court doctor was Euro-

pean, of course. He told me that she was suffering from suppressed hysteria, and I must not believe her. As soon as she had gone, he made excuse to go away shooting. He went in the direction of the mountains, and he never came back. My friend, on my word of honor, and by the tie between us, the things that I have told you are true. Believe me!"

Yates got up and paced the carpet.

"I believe that you believe them," he said presently. "So far as they are facts, of course, I accept them from you; but as to the reasons why they didn't come back—well, I've lived in India for five years, and peeped over the fence. You may be right; but, if you'll let me go, I'll chance it. I'm a poor man, and I want money to marry the girl at home."

"I will not let you go, my friend," the raja refused. "To-morrow you shall choose two stones from the diamonds still in my treasury. They will suffice for your purpose. That is finished—now we will talk of something else. There are some fine diamonds in my possession still, although most of them, as I said, were sold during the famine. If the crops fail again, a jewel more or less will not matter. They are not enough now to feed my people until another harvest. They would have to die anyhow; and I should be beggared, vainly trying to keep them alive. So it will not matter if I die; and perhaps I may brave the god who requites. It is late. We will say good night. To-morrow you shall go on your way rejoicing."

He held out his hand, and Yates took it.

"Not to-morrow," he demurred. "We'll see how the crops turn out. If they're all right, I'll take the two diamonds and go. Your highness, the country is scorched as dry as hell. There isn't a blade of green to make my eyes fill with the thought of England. If the crops fail again—I think they will—and you're beggared, I'll try the adventure with you!"

The raja pressed the Englishman's hand.

"I swear it," he vowed, "by the god who weighs a life against a life! Let us go and look out upon the night, my friend. I would talk with you of other things."

II

THE raja clapped his hands, and servants came, bowing their foreheads to the ground. The girl with the green necklace rested her cheeks upon his sandals in hys-

terical homage. There was a blind god, she chanted, who weighed life against life; and when he claimed the great soul of her mighty raja, she would cheat him in his blindness with the mean little soul of this dust at his highness's feet!

"No, Lillah," said the raja, "you shall cheat him in another way. Since you have learned from your father, our locksmith, the craft of firearms, it shall be your duty to see that my rifles are truly loaded before I go out shooting. Such is my trust in you!"

"Ah!" cried the girl. "My lord! My lord!"

"Our great lord, who feeds his people," crooned an old man, bent double, "and regardeth the dust under his feet!"

The raja waved them aside, and said that his need of them was finished for tonight. They prostrated themselves to the ground in rows, and he walked through them—the green-necklace girl stealthily kissed the hem of his garment—and passed up the marble staircase with his arm through the arm of Yates.

"Dust underfoot!" he muttered thoughtfully. "They seem little more to you and me, perhaps; but when you rule the dust, and it feels and breathes, you *have* to regard it, I think. Your Christian Europeanism comes back to the creed of our old gods, observe. A life is but a life in the scales of the blind god."

"Our blind god is rather partial," Yates observed. "Cupid, you know!"

"Ah!" said the raja. "That was paganism—no religion, but only a spasm of unbelief between the old true gods and the new true God. The Greeks and the Romans didn't really believe in their paltry divinities. Look out from the terrace with me, Yates. The stars are nearer to God than we are, we say. Perhaps the stardwellers say the same thing of earth; for who knows where He dwells? I remember that I stood just there one evening when I came back home after three years at Eton, where they taught us to be men. I felt sick at the subservience and the cringing. I had longed all day to kick the salaaming fools to their feet; and I rebelled at the fate that set me to rule over such dust. Presently I heard a voice in the dusk behind me.

"'To God,' it said, 'all these worlds are but specks of dust. We are specks within the specks; and yet we would not have Him despise us.'

"It was my old tutor. He was a wise man, I knew, and a good man, though I hadn't suspected it before, thinking of him rather as a great cricketer, a grand sportsman, and friend. He put his arm through mine and stood there beside me, but said nothing, and let me think for a long time.

"'Well?' he asked at last.

"And then I turned to him.

"'I will try to copy God's way with the dust that I am born to rule,' I said, 'and with the dust within the dust.'

"Yates, they have suffered much with this famine. If I had not been able to buy grain from Australia, most of them would be dead; and if the crops in the ground fail again, most of them will die now."

"It can't be helped," Yates said. "There are things that you can't fight with rifles, or doctors, or priests, or diamonds. Famine is one of the old gods. You can save a few of the dust-specks with my two diamonds, if the need comes. No, one of them. One can go to the girl in England, in case I don't go back."

"You won't go back," the raja asserted, "if we go there. We shall not be offering our lives for others; and mine will not suffice to pay. If the crops are doomed to fail—I have an expert who will tell me in a few days—and we went to get the treasure in time for my share to feed my starving people, then perhaps *my* life only would pay, my friend!"

"Or mine," Yates suggested.

"Ah," said the raja, "but you would go for yourself."

"No," Yates denied. "For the girl overseas. Perhaps also for you. Will your highness pardon me for claiming your friendship, as between two men European-bred? I never thought to say that even to the highest of another continent."

The raja held out his hand, and Yates gripped it strongly. They looked out silently into the night. The heavens were spread like a thick carpet, patterned with stars.

"Old gods and new gods," Yates whispered. "Anyhow, God! And we are dust of the earth beneath His feet. Who can tell what His way may be with us?"

"Who can tell?" the raja echoed.

III

THEY hunted and played tennis for three days, and made merry in the evenings. On the fourth day the common people prayed

in their way for rain, but no cloud came. On the fifth day the people of the raja's household prayed for rain, but there was no sign of any.

On the sixth day the English chaplain prayed for rain, but still none came. On the seventh day they all prayed, but in vain.

On the eighth day the experts advised the raja that the crops would certainly fail. On the ninth day the raja and Yates set out for the mountains, with the court doctor and some bearers. The priests blessed them, and the English chaplain blessed them. The deputy chief water-carrier wept to come and share their dangers; but the raja refused him.

"I lay the duty upon you," he said, "to guard your wife, who guards my life by watching the loading of my rifles!"

Thereupon both the man and his wife begged to come, but the raja refused them.

"Dust," he remarked to Yates, as they went on, "but dust that lives and feels, and hurts or is hurt, and bears memory of kindness and unkindness. Heavens, Yates, the country people are still lean from the last famine!"

"Infernally lean," Yates agreed; "but the treasure will suffice to fatten them."

The first day was uneventful, except that Yates shot two tigers and the raja one. The second day Yates shot two, the raja three, and the doctor one. The doctor's kill was an event, for he was a poor shot.

"I hope he's better at medicine than at musketry," Yates remarked to the raja.

"I don't think he's much at medicine," the raja confessed. "I chose him as a man. He ought to escape the blind god. He isn't coming for treasure, but for me. He'll say the least and understand the most, you'll find at the end."

The third day they traveled through jungle and swamp—swamp caked a foot deep with the drought, but letting them through sometimes. A vile smell oozed up then, and the doctor dosed them all with quinin. The raja and Yates shot two tigers apiece, and a mad elephant, which the doctor missed. He shot the loin-cloth of a bearer; but the man luckily was unscratched.

On the fourth day, in the morning, they reached the mountains. The heat seemed to be concentrated between them, and the bearers staggered so that the raja, Yates, and the doctor marched afoot till they also staggered.

In the afternoon they came under the shadow of a great mountain with overhanging cliffs. Here they found the path, and the opening, and the caves, just as the plan of Abdul Sindh had shown. The raja and Yates and the doctor went in, bearing torches, until they found that the places were lit dimly but sufficiently by cracks and crevices in the mountain rock. Presently they reached the great inner cave; and there they kept close together, whispering as they saw fresh things in the half light.

The temple was a roundish oblong, perhaps two hundred feet by a hundred, and varying in height between twenty and forty feet. Yates reckoned thirty-six braziers hanging from the roof. There was still a faint smell of incense, together with a stronger smell from the dusty praying-carpets beneath their feet.

There were many graven images and carvings in the temple and on the walls. They counted fourteen big statues, but only seven of these were gods, the raja thought. A set of seven placed by themselves appeared rather to represent the seven deadly sins.

The raja could not account for all the gods. Two which were roughly hewn in the rock he thought belonged to a very early period. The shaggy man with outstanding muscles and a monstrous club, with little men under his feet and a struggling woman under his left arm, was doubtless the primitive god of brute force—the brutality of man and man-imaged gods. A huge figure that was half elephant and half dog—the dog with a touch of tiger—with a man, a woman, and a child in his mouth, he thought to be a variant of the same idea—the brutality of nature.

Another pair had altars with huge incense-pots of gold upon them, and the remains of burned sacrifices. One was a sweet-faced woman, whose dress was covered with little flowers, wonderfully carved. The other was a man-faced fiend, with serpents for arms, long-drawn tigers for legs, buffalo horns for ears, and fingers of snakes.

"Good and evil, I suppose," the raja whispered. "Evil had the bigger altar and more sacrifices, you notice. The world hasn't altered so much! And now—"

They came to the blind god of expiation by blood, and stumbled over a skeleton on the floor.

"Abdul Sindh!" Yates whispered.

He shivered, though he was wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

IV

THEY stared silently at the blind god.

He sat on an ivory throne, fretted with metal—iron, they judged—under the loftiest part of the roof, which he almost reached. His face and even his figure were utterly expressionless. That was what struck one—he was so even-sided; every line of feature and form, every fold of clothing on the right and on the left, corresponded so exactly. He weighed a small man and a big man in his hands; but the hands were exactly even. He trod a stout man and a thin man under his feet; but the feet were at the same height. The difference was that the stout man bulged out more than the thin man.

"God of justice," the raja called, "these are but my servants. It is I who claim the treasure. Judge *me*!"

"No," Yates protested. "I stand with my friend or fall with him. I—"

He paused for a word, and the doctor tapped his shoulder.

"If he's the god of justice," he said calmly, "he'll be just; and if he isn't, it's no use talking to him."

There was a long silence. Then they lifted the altar-cloth. Much dust fell, and some of the cloth with it. They found a coffer of scented wood studded with golden nails. It was smaller than they expected, but the jewels within agreed with the number that Abdul Sindh had catalogued—two hundred and seventy-nine. They counted them afterward, and found them larger and more perfect than their dreams.

They lifted the coffer between them, and hurried away. They spoke no word till they were outside; and they did not look behind even then.

"There's an hour of daylight," Yates remarked, mopping his forehead. "Let's get off—away from here!"

"My friend," the raja answered, "man cannot flee the gods!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Yates. "There's a fence, as you said."

"Ah, the fence!" The raja shook his head. "We can't get inside for two nights."

"And here," the doctor claimed, "we are out of the fever region. That's our real danger—the fever. I'd camp on this little hill and avoid it to-night."

They camped accordingly, on a little hill just outside the opening in the mountains. The raja made his will, and the doctor and Yates witnessed it, before he went to sleep. He left his large share of the treasure to a fund to protect his people against famine; temporarily by the purchase of food as necessary, and afterward by irrigation, "or other measures as required," to prevent a recurrence of serious failure with crops.

"In case I have fever to-morrow," he explained cheerfully.

"You won't, your highness," the doctor assured him.

But he had—very badly.

They made the journey home in two days, carrying the raja in a litter. They saw no wild beasts all the way, and no one else took the fever.

The raja revived sufficiently, on their arrival, to instruct them to telegraph for rice and grain; but the telegram was unnecessary, as large supplies had arrived from an English relief fund. Moreover, there had been some rain—though none had troubled the travelers in the wild—and a partial crop was assured.

"So," the raja said, "I may seem to die in vain; but some day and somehow there will be requital."

Then he became unconscious. The doctor said that he gave him about six hours.

His people took the news very hard, and lay in the streets, covering their heads with dust and wailing. The girl with the green necklace and her husband crawled on their faces to Yates and the doctor, and followed them about, still crawling, to beseech that they might kiss the feet of their master before he died. The steward and the doctor would have had them put outside; but Yates pleaded for them.

"It can't hurt him," he said; "and—and I think he'd rather like it. He was a damned good sort!"

Yates's eyes were very blinky, somehow.

So they were admitted to the sick-room, and knelt at the raja's feet and kissed them. Presently the girl rose to her feet and stretched out her arms.

"Great god who weighest life with life!" she screamed. "Spare my master's and take mine!"

"S-ssh!" the doctor cried. "You silly girl!" His voice broke suddenly. "We'd all die for him if it was any use, child; but it isn't. Your master has probably opened his eyes for the last time."

"Great god!" the girl shrieked. "Great god who weighest life with life! Open his eyes and close mine!"

She reeled. Her husband, the deputy chief water-carrier, caught her.

"She has the fever," he sobbed. "Oh, heart of the rose! I will die, too!"

"Fever!" the doctor snapped. "Nonsense! It's hysterics. Carry her out, man! Yates, old chap, he is near the end. He might be conscious for a few seconds, and he would like us to shake his hand. The only oriental I ever felt was really my friend!"

"Or I," said Yates. "He—he—"

"He's opening his eyes," the doctor interrupted. "Dear, dear friend!"

They took a hand each, and knelt beside the bed. The raja looked at them and smiled faintly.

"Dear friends," he told them, "I am not going to die; but I have been near death.

The blind god weighed me in the scale against sixteen lives. They weighed me up—up; but the girl whom I spared leaped into the scale with me, and we outweighed them, and I sprang out of the cup, to live!"

Yates's voice broke into a shrill, womanish falsetto.

"And the girl stayed in?"

"Why, no!" said the raja. "No! I lifted her out first, of course."

Then he fell into a natural sleep.

"We will go and see the woman," the doctor said, in his every-day voice; "but it will only be hysteria."

"Only hysteria," Yates agreed. His voice was still a trifle out of control. "But, if he had left her behind, she would have been claimed by the blind god."

The doctor paused in his walk to the door, and turned to Yates.

"You don't see the truth," he cried, "even yet. The god isn't blind!"

The Singer of the Court

THE ROMANCE OF THE PRINCESS LURY AND HER KNIGHTLY TROUBADOUR

By Mella Russell McCallum

LURY pushed the flat-iron back and forth, back and forth. The tenebrous kitchen was stifling. From the bedroom beyond Mrs. Madden's voice whined:

"You're scorchin' somethin'!"

"No, I ain't, ma. It's the paper the iron sets on."

Lury's voice was pleasant. She shook a damp lock back from her forehead.

"Funny how a thin person like me can feel the heat so!" she muttered to herself. "If I didn't have his singin' to look forward to, I don't know—"

She shut her lips tightly, pinching off the threat to fate that rose to her lips. Her little triangle of a face looked hard and old.

In happier days Lury had been pretty; but fierce fighting for existence had made angles out of curves, and fatigue had blurred girlish charm. Her wide, brown

eyes, with their tragic depths, told the story of an uneven battle with life—a story seldom told by her lips, however. For what was the use of complaining? It never got you anywhere. Besides, lately there had been compensation—the daily visits of the singer of the court.

Back and forth, back and forth, went the iron.

"If it's my sheets you're doin', mind you iron 'em flat, Lury. It's hard enough to have to lay in bed all day long, anyway, without layin' on wrinkles. Ain't it time for my medicine?"

"Not yet, ma. It's only half past nine."

"Half past nine! Good gracious, it's hours since you got me my breakfast. What made you get breakfast so early this morning?"

"You said you was awake, and you wanted it, you know, ma."

"Well, I think I ought to have a bite in between then, if you're bound to get the meals so far apart!"

"All right, ma—just as quick as I get this piece off."

Back and forth—oh, it was hot! If only the singer would hurry and come!

As she changed irons, Lury looked out of the one window, which gave on a narrow court. The space outside was crisscrossed with wash-lines that ran over pulleys. All day long the pulleys rattled and squeaked. Beyond the lines were other open windows, other broiling kitchens.

Below her, on the second floor, Mr. San Pietro was practising scales on his flute. Above her the O'Rourke phonograph earnestly invoked one *Brighteyes*. The smell of gasoline from Abie Rosenberg's French cleaning establishment met her nostrils. Somewhere a hurdy-gurdy was jingling out the "Miserere."

She sighed. It was a drab place, that courtyard—as drab as herself. Its pavement was littered with dirt and rags and orange peelings; but soon, when the singer of the court should arrive, it would be transformed into a fairy pleasance. The tenement would become a castle. The kitchen would be a princess's chamber; while she—the princess—would presently stand rapt, listening to her lover's song.

Lury started, and came back to earth and ironing.

"What nonsense!" she scolded herself. "I don't even know what he looks like. He's sure to be a lot younger 'n I am—and a street-singer ain't no good, anyway, or else he wouldn't be a street-singer!"

She set her lips still more tightly in self-disapproval. That made her look old and sharp and pinched again. There was no one to tell her not to set her lips tightly; no one to tell her that she ought to smile more, because smiling brought back her girlish prettiness.

She snapped out a damp garment on the board. Back and forth, sharply, went the iron.

"How much pay did you get Saturday, Lury?" Mrs. Madden had evidently forgotten that she was hungry.

"Fifteen dollars, ma."

"That all? Seemed like you was workin' more 'n usual."

Lury's cheeks went hot. It hurt her to lie to ma; but something stronger than herself had made her address two hundred

and fifty extra envelopes last week, in order that she might pay tribute to the singer of the court, as did her neighbors. She didn't mind listening empty-handed to the ordinary ballad-whiner; but this one was different. Although she had seen him but dimly through the kitchen sash-curtain, three stories above the court, she was sure that he was gay and debonair. His attitudes were courtly, and his voice held a human note that had touched the imagination of the whole neighborhood.

Lury didn't know whether that note was joyous or sad; it seemed to be both. Children stopped their screeching when he sang. Fat women with greasy faces sighed and wiped their eyes. His sweeping, untrained barytone quickened the pulse, and brought a sharp, happy pain to the heart. No wonder that starved little Lury Madden dreamed of romance; that she imagined she was a princess, and that he was her knight.

Back and forth shuttled the iron.

"I wonder why that young man that took you to the dance never comes no more," called out the invalid. "My other girls always had their reg'lar comp'ny."

Lury started. She never could get used to those mental lapses of her mother.

"Why, don't you remember, ma?" she said gently. "That party was two years ago, and Bud McNitt's been married this long time. Don't you remember, he married that blond cashier from Hodges's Bazaar? They've got a baby now."

Lury spoke of her past "company" without bitterness. Bud McNitt's robust attentions had been repellent to her. She had been as much relieved as chagrined when he had haltingly informed her that he was sorry, but he couldn't marry a girl with "sick relations on her hands."

"Oh, yes, I do rec'lect your tellin' me, now." Mrs. Madden took the correction amiably. "I declare, it seems like yesterday you went to that dance, lookin' so pretty, with your pink dress on, an' your feather fan. Why don't you go to parties nowadays? You'll be an old maid, first thing!"

"I don't like parties, ma." Another lie! But it would never do to remind her mother that she hadn't had a beau since Bud; that a girl who has to stay in all the time to care for an invalid has no chances socially. That truth would bring on one of ma's "spells," and a "spell," of all things, was to be avoided.

"Why, Lury Madden, I think it's downright wicked for you not to like parties! It ain't nat'ral. My other girls wasn't that way. Mamie was married at seventeen, an' Aggie at eighteen; an' here you're twenty-four a'ready! You ain't got proper pride an' spunk, that's what! You ought to primp up and get out more!"

"Ma, please! You know—" Lury hesitated. A reference to their poverty had been known to cause a spell. It was hard to decide just how much of the truth to tell ma. "You know we ain't burdened with an overly sight of money for new clothes just at present," she said cautiously.

She was afraid she had said too much. She waited fearfully for ma's reply; but the problem was taken out of her hands this time.

Suddenly, up through the court, came the soft twang of a guitar. Lury's heart leaped. The noises died. Even the smells seemed less acrid. The singer of the court had come!

"Oh, 'twas sweet of old,
When our love we told,
And the waves sang to the shore—"

Lury set her iron on the stove softly, and turned the gas low. Then she sat down in the chair by the window. This was the one time in the day that she allowed herself to loaf. She leaned forward ecstatically—but not out of the window, as she knew her neighbors were doing.

"My Lord, to think any one can sing like that!" she whispered.

"But it's sad for me
Now beside the sea,
For you're far from me, ashore—"

The O'Rourke phonograph was hushed. Mr. San Pietro had left off practising his scales. Even her mother was silent, as that silver voice rose and fell.

Lury closed her eyes and let imagination riot. He was her knight, singing for her favor. Every day he came to her chamber window, pleading, pleading; but a princess is not lightly won! Perhaps, some day, she might reward his languishing. Perhaps she might drop down some romantic trifle, to give him hope—a wisp of a faint-scented handkerchief—a ribbon—a fan—

All sensible people know that a soul starved in one direction tries to flourish in another. Denied natural satisfaction, it must find nourishment unnaturally, or die.

Lury's soul, long starved, had seized upon the first material at hand—a voice—and had built a dream about it. In the weeks that the singer had been coming, she had become an artist at make-believe. For the time being she could forget reality entirely. Now she forgot that she had no wisps of handkerchiefs—but only stout squares from the ten-cent store. She forgot that she hadn't a ribbon to her name, and that her only fan was a moth-eaten relic of that dance long ago.

"For the waves still are singing to the shore,
As they sang in the happy days of yore,
And my heart is forever thine, love—"

At the ending of the song there came a sharp applause, and a slender rain of coins. People shouted in several languages for more.

Lury stumbled to her feet. With shaking fingers she took down a tiny wrapped package from the shelf above the gas-stove. It was a dime, wrapped in paper—the compensation received for addressing fifty envelopes in long hand.

But even now she did not lean out to make her offering. She wanted to see her knight's features; but she was cautious. If she showed herself, he would see how absolutely uninteresting she was. He would see that she was simply one of thousands of tired girls, with damply stringy hair, and eyes too big for her face. She would rank as zero in the eyes of critical, debonair youth; for critical, debonair youth is wont to demand sparkling glances and cherry lips.

But there is no law to prevent a weary, faded girl from making a little bit of delicious mystery of herself. Lury thrust out her bare arm—a white, still shapely arm—and dropped the tiny package.

It fell with a dull thud, different from the clink of bare coins. Dimly, through the cheese-cloth curtain, she saw him stoop to retrieve it, then bow in acknowledgment. Such a courtly bow! She saw him raise his head, as if he were looking for the mysterious donor. This was the third day she had paid tribute thus. Evidently she had him wondering. It was vastly exciting!

"That fellow sings pretty," commented her mother. "I wish we could afford to throw him some pennies!"

Lury jumped. She had forgotten her mother's existence.

"He'll sing again anyway, ma," she said. "He always does, you know."

Through the curtain she saw that he was changing his position. He was preparing to give his encore facing her window! He had never done that before.

The guitar twanged its soft prelude. Oh, if only she might draw the curtain aside and gaze her fill upon those handsome features! But no, no, no! She must keep up her game.

"It would be all up with you, Lury Madden, once you let him see your chaperoon of a face!" she warned herself. "He wouldn't be no more interested in you than he is in Mis' O'Rourke, drapin' her fat an' her freckles all over the sill up-stairs!"

"Ah, soon may those dear eyes of brown
Welcome me back to Moscow town!"

Lury abandoned herself to the encore. Again she was the beloved—waiting.

Then, the next thing she knew, the play was done. He was walking on to the next court with his light, easy step. The guitar swung jauntily from his shoulder. His wide-brimmed, rakish hat passed from her bird's-eye view. The noises of the day began all over again—the screeching, the flute, the phonograph, and her mother.

"I ain't sure that it's right for that fellow to stir me up the way he does, Lury. He fairly puts me back in my courtin' days, with your father hangin' around, pesterin' me to set the day! I guess I'm goin' to cry, Lury!"

"Don't, ma—please! I'm goin' to get you that bite to eat now; then you'll feel better."

Mrs. Madden accepted the substitute. She sat up in bed and ate eagerly. She was a large woman, with a face curiously unlined for an invalid's. She forgot about crying.

II

LURY whipped through the rest of the ironing. Then she took down a big box of envelopes, and got at the real work of the day. She was a good penman, and rapid. Ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred—five hundred. By noon she had earned a dollar. Then she got dinner, made her mother comfortable for a nap, and went out for supplies. Then back at the envelopes till six. Then supper. Then more envelopes. It was an average day.

Sometimes, before the advent of the

singer, Lury used to think bitter things. She used to doubt the wisdom of life, for ma and for her. Ma wasn't happy, lying there, thinking of other days. She herself wasn't happy, with her young shoulders bent under the crushing task of bread-earning at home. If she could have worked in a factory—but ma wouldn't stay with strangers.

At times it had seemed as if it would be best to give in—to take the gas route out of it all; but there was more than a bit of the Puritan in Lury's straight American ancestry. The Maddens and her mother's people, the Joneses, had been stodgy and lowly, but they had been brave men and women. They had met life squarely and stubbornly; and there was that same stubborn something in Lury that refused to more than dally with the coward's way. So she had always stumbled on.

Lury's married sisters talked sometimes about "making a home for ma," but that was all that ever came of it. Not that Lury blamed them much. They had their troubles, what with so many children, and Aggie's man flighty and Mamie's a tightwad. She didn't exactly envy her sisters. She almost—not quite—preferred her own lot to theirs. She would have preferred it quite, if only she and ma weren't so grindingly poor, and if only she could rest sometimes; but rest meant less envelopes—less pay—ruin.

At half past eleven she bolted the door. Her mother was sleeping like a child. She undressed in orderly haste, as she had learned to do everything. Her bed was a cot in the corner of the kitchen. Just as she was about to climb into it, a marvelous thing happened—a bar of real moonlight entered the room.

There was a certain time in the month when this phenomenon occurred. It never lasted long—the narrow court and the three tenement stories above took care of that; but it was very wonderful while it did last.

Lury knew she ought to disregard the moonlight. She ought to go right straight to bed; but she allowed herself to be drawn over to the half-open window. She lifted the sash as high as it would go, and pushed the curtain aside. Then she knelt, in her plain, cheap little gown, and rested her arms on the sill. She looked, had she but known it, not unlike the princess now, all white and chaste in the moonlight.

The air stirred softly. The only noise

was the city's humming undertone. Her heart was full of unformed poetry.

So, in the moonlight, must the princess have knelt. So must the heart of the princess have softened toward her faithful one. So must the princess have whispered:

"To-morrow when he comes, I will reward him. I will throw him a favor that will bid him have hope!"

She reached out her arms to the soft night. Her lips were half parted, half smiling.

But the moon, serenely indifferent, sailed on past their court, trailing its light to less appreciative kitchens. The Madden flat grew dark again. A sudden raw gust of air smote through Lury's thin gown. She shivered, rose hastily, and lowered the window half-way.

"I'm an idiot!" she told herself. "The idea of my imaginin' that any fellow 'd look twice at me nowadays! He's prob'ly got a couple o' sweethearts to every block, anyway—and he's only a common street-singer! What would ma think of me, if she knew I had thoughts about a street-singer? Me—a Madden!"

She got into bed stiffly.

III

POETS have said that romance is a delicate flower; that it is as elusive as gossamer. That is all nonsense. It is the stoutest plant that grows. When Lury awoke next morning it was still struggling in her weary little heart, and not even the thought of another day of drudgery and envelopes could kill it.

Almost her first thought, as she put on the coffee-pot, was:

"What fun it would be to throw him down my fan! I wonder what he'd do! I wonder if I'd dare!"

Through the early morning hours she waged a losing fight with the idea. When the soft guitar notes came at last she ran into the bedroom and to the bureau. Her blood was tingling wine. He was singing—

"And, sweet my love, look down;
For day dwells in thy smile, love,
And night dwells in thy frown."

Ah, that voice—that voice!

She ran back to the kitchen with the fan; but when she looked at it her heart misgave her. The moth-eaten spots were larger than she remembered. Nevertheless, it was still bravely pink, thanks to its hav-

ing been wrapped in tissue paper all this time. She pressed it to her lips. The princess had decided!

"What you jumpin' around for like a frog this mornin'?" her mother demanded.

Lury laughed. It would take more than a fretful query to dampen this mood!

"Didn't know I was," she answered cheerily.

Trembling with excitement, she reached for the next wrapped dime on the shelf and tied it to the fan. The song was ending! She kissed the fan again, with the dime bobbing; then she thrust her bare arm under the curtain. Her offering fell with a double thud.

She scarcely breathed, watching through the thick mesh. He was acknowledging other offerings, bowing gallantly to right and to left. Now he picked up the fan. She fancied she could still see the tiny package dangling from it. He turned it in his hand.

Her heart almost burst. She was afraid! What if he was laughing? If only his hat wasn't so wide-brimmed, and the curtain so thick!

Below her Jimmy San Pietro called out: "Some skoit sweet on youse, mister?"

There was a general titter. She had forgotten to reckon with her neighbors. Humiliation choked her.

What if some one should come to her mother with a story about her flirting with a street-singer? Mrs. Madden was proud. In the stodgy code of the Maddens and the Joneses a street-singer was no better than an outcast.

Oh, what was he doing? Could it be—or was her tragic gaze deceiving her? Yes, he was! He was holding the fan at arm's length, dramatically. He seemed to be gazing upon it. Now, with a jealous sweep of his arm, he was carrying it to his lips—kissing it, right before all the gaping people.

He opened his coat and put the fan into the pocket over his heart. Neither cheese-cloth nor distance could hide the tenderness of the gesture.

Then the mercurial audience responded in earnest. No tittering now! They loved a theatrical performance. There was loud applause. Jimmy San Pietro was unanimously outruled.

The singer raised his hand to silence them. Turning with slow ceremony toward Lury's window, he gave his encore. It was "Asthore" again, and it seemed as

if Lury could not bear the beautiful pain in her heart. For—there was no doubt about it—he was singing it to her!

"And the night winds are whispering to the trees
That they bring me a message o'er the seas,
That your heart is forever mine, love—
I am waiting for thee, asthore!"

A silent sob shook Lury's thin body. She had not known there could be so much joy in the world.

The applause outside was riotous. Perhaps he would give another encore!

Suddenly from behind her came a dreaded sound.

"Lury!"

She had forgotten everything on earth save the singer and herself. Now she scrambled to her feet. It was the signal for a spell.

"Lury! Your pa! He's standin' right here by me—come from his grave!"

Lury ran into the bedroom.

"Now, ma, dear, you know that couldn't be so!"

She must keep her mother in bed at any cost; but Mrs. Madden was too quick for her. She was already up, a huge, weaving, white figure.

"Your pa—your pa!" she screamed. "Come from his grave—and that singer feller brung him! I tell you that singer ain't nat'ral!"

"Ma, you got to get back in bed. You know you can't stand on your feet!"

Her mother struck her aside.

"I'm goin' to die! That's what! That singer's a prophet! He brung your pa back—and now I'm goin' to your pa! Lemme 'lone!"

Lury struggled with the heavy frame, but her mother had the strength of frenzy. In spite of Lury's wiry muscles, the invalid took a step. Then she did just what her daughter expected. She toppled over, and struck her head on the edge of a chair as she went down. She lay in a dead faint, the blood staining her thin gray hair.

"Help!" screamed Lury.

She forgot the singer now. He was singing a third song unheeded—the pretty one about "dear eyes of brown."

"Help!" she screamed out of the window.

It seemed as if her mother would die there on the floor before she could get aid. She dashed a wet cloth to Mrs. Madden's face. She examined the wound. It was

only a surface cut. She tried again to lift the heavy form. Impossible!

Oh, would no one ever come? Mrs. O'Rourke must have heard her scream.

There was a sound in the kitchen. Some one was coming in through the window from the fire-escape. She went out, and faced—not a familiar O'Rourke or a San Pietro or a Rosenberg, but a tall man with lean, irregular features and a guitar swung over one shoulder.

For a second he stared back at Lury. Then, as the scene in the bedroom caught his eye, his loose posture of inquiry tightened to understanding. At once he flung off the strap that held the guitar.

"You take her feet—so!" he directed.

"Easy, now! Don't you lift—I'll do that. Steady—feet higher than head—so! Now fresh water, and we'll soon have her around!"

Automatically Lury obeyed. She brought water. She pulled the blanket over her mother.

"The sheet's enough."

He turned the blanket down again, and began to work over Mrs. Madden. He seemed to know exactly what to do.

Lury watched him dazedly. His hands were large and ungainly—and gentle. Could it be possible that this quiet, efficient fellow was the singer of the court?

There was a knock, and Mrs. O'Rourke bounced in, apologizing for her delay.

"Faith, me Nora fell into the bread-sponge," she panted. "Settin' on the floor it was, and me forgittin' all about it, a listenin' to the lovely singin'! Is it your ma, Lury?"

Lury nodded. Mrs. O'Rourke waddled forward and spied the man at the bedside.

"Well, upon me word, if it isn't himsilf—and handy as the docthor!"

The singer went on with his ministrations. Presently Mrs. Madden looked up naturally, and fell at once into a prompt, sound slumber. Three pairs of eyes exchanged relieved glances.

"So!" said the man, rising to his awkward height. "I think she'll be all right now."

"Sure, and you can call on me if she ain't, Lury," Mrs. O'Rourke said, as she backed out. "I must be gittin' the dough washed off me Nora—and Timmy O'Rourke's biscuits gone to the divvil!" She laughed easily, and shook a chubby fist at the singer. "Faith, 'tis your fault,

with your singin' of Irish songs in the mornin', when honest ladies has their woik to do!"

Lury and the man couldn't keep from smiling as she bumped away up the stairs.

"She's an awful good neighbor," said Lury, embarrassed.

"I have no doubt of it, miss. Well, I must be gettin' along now."

He picked up his instrument from the drain-board where he had laid it.

"I—I can't thank you enough!"

"It wasn't nothing at all. I'm used to sick folks."

"You are?"

The words were jarred from Lury. It seemed so strange for a street-singer to have anything in common with her own humdrum existence. He wasn't one bit as she had pictured him. He wasn't even courtly of gesture, as he had seemed to be through the curtain.

"Yes'm." He leaned against the laundry-tub, fumbling with the strap of the guitar. "I took care of my own mother for thirteen years. Folks said it was a blessing when she went; but it wasn't for me. I miss doing for her."

"Oh!"

Lury's head whirled. If it hadn't been for the guitar and the incurably rakish old hat, she would have sworn that he was not the singer of the court at all; and yet she didn't mind the fact that he spoke her own language.

"I must be gettin' along now," he repeated. "You see, I have to do my sleepin' daytimes."

He gave an embarrassed little laugh as he went over to the door.

"Your sleepin'! Oh, excuse me! I didn't mean to be nosy."

"Yes'm. I ain't a professional street-singer, miss. I just do it for—well, pastime, an hour or so mornings, before I go to bed. I'm a cook—short order, at the Queen Lunch, 12 to 9 A.M. I used to imagine I was goin' to be a great opera-singer!" Again the embarrassed laugh. "It was a silly dream, all right!"

"Oh, but you could be a great singer, with your voice!" Lury forgot her own embarrassment. "Now, with no sick person to hamper you, you ought to go on and have a career!"

He shook his head, smiling.

"No, I ain't got the right kind of a voice for it. I went to a big teacher once, and

he told me straight. He knocked my air castles flat, all right!"

"That was cruel! Maybe he didn't know, anyway!"

"That's what I thought, too, at the time; so I went to two more teachers—big fellows. They told me the same thing. It seems there's more to bein' a great singer than just havin' a pleasin' tone. No, it wasn't cruel to tell me the truth. It would have been crueller to let me go on, and fizzle out, and maybe break my fool heart—wouldn't it, now?"

"I—suppose so!"

Lury drew a sharp breath.

"Don't look so distressful, miss. I don't mind it no more. I get a lot of pleasure singin' as I do. I like to watch folks' faces when I sing. I like to make believe—but that's no news to you!"

He reddened painfully. Lury wished she could say something—something light and easy. Her heart was pounding so hard she was afraid he would hear it.

"Sounds kind of dotty, don't it? An old chap like me!"

"Oh, no, no!" she faltered. "You ain't old!"

"Thirty-two, miss." He touched a patch of graying hair above his ear. "And I'm not so very handy at makin' friends; so you got to excuse it on them grounds. It's all the human society I get. You see, the young folks I used to know are all married, and got their own families comin' up. While they was havin' fun, an' pairin' off, I was terrible concerned with my mother, and—well, it left me sort of stranded high and dry after mother died. I thought I'd go bust inside with lonesomeness. Then I got to figurin'. 'The Almighty don't intend for folks to go bust inside,' I said. 'One of the things He give 'em brains for was so's they wouldn't.' So I hit on to my scheme for gettin' over the lonesome places—I sing in the courts."

He voiced his philosophy with simple faith. Lury's wide, wavering gaze had steadied under his earnestness.

"I understand what you mean about goin' bust inside," she said quickly. "I understand so well!"

He smiled back.

"I used to get human enjoyment playin' in an orchestra; but old Drake died—the leader—and now, with the queer workin' hours I got, I couldn't anyway. And I don't feel like givin' up the good wages I

make at the Queen Lunch for a musician's starvation pay."

"I went to a dance once where Drake's Orchestra played. It was two years ago—the Teamsters' Union, at the Firemen's Hall."

"Sho! I must have been there, jinglin' the banjo. So you was one of them pretty young ladies whizzin' around!"

Lury wished she could stop blushing. She didn't know that it was becoming—that she had dropped off the hard, pinched look.

"Well, I really must be gettin' along," said the singer positively.

Lury breathed fast. It was all so different from the make-believe! The princess seemed a far-away, colorless creature, compared with her own pulsing being. The knight seemed rather absurd, with his extreme youth and his languishing, compared with this sober and mature man. As their eyes met again, she sensed a soul as lonely and hungry as her own.

"I don't know your name yet"—she was amazed to hear herself say it—"but I hope you'll come to see my mother and me sometimes."

His homely face lighted.

"My name is Edward W. Dingle." Then the light faded. "But you're only askin' me to be polite, 'count of me givin' you a hand."

"I'm not!" flared Lury.

For a second he appraised her somberly. Then his manner changed. He threw off his awkwardness and became the knight again—not the absurdly young and debonair creature who had swayed Lury's imagination, but a wise, experienced knight, graceful, yet mature; romantic, yet real. Edward W. Dingle bowed low before her. He was the play-actor of the court again—only it wasn't just acting!

Lury understood him now. She knew that there were two sides to him, as with herself—one humdrum, sick with striving against uneven odds, the other forever reaching out, incurably fanciful.

"I'll be pleased to come, Miss—" His voice trailed inquiringly.

"My name is Lurabel Madden."

"Lurabel—Lurabel!" said Edward W. Dingle reverently.

Ever afterward Lury loved the sound of her own name.

She wondered if she should offer to shake hands with him. She decided not.

"Good-by," he said. "I'll take good care of—your fan."

He touched his breast and started to leave the room.

Suddenly he turned back. The conventions of Lury's world are rigid, but they are sooner overcome than in the happier, veneered ways of life. His arms came about her in a quick embrace.

"Lurabel—Lurabel!" His voice vibrated like a song. "I was afraid for you to see me up close, so old and ugly—and you with those pretty white arms! Oh, I knew you were beautiful! Can I really come?"

"Yes," said Lury.

She went back into the kitchen with his kiss tingling on her lips—a knight's kiss, and a man's kiss, but not like Bud McNitt's had been.

She glanced about with new eyes. The tubs, the sink, the stove, the table full of envelopes—not one object appalled her. She looked in at her mother, still sleeping peacefully. A wave of compassion for poor ma rose within her. Ma's own love-story was long, long past; while she—oh, she was *sure!*—she was just entering the state of the beloved.

"Oh, God, he thinks I'm beautiful!" she said in an awed whisper.

IV

"BUT where did you get to know him?"

Mrs. Madden's faded eyes rested gratefully on a pot of red tulips in the window—one of Edward W. Dingle's gifts. It was two weeks afterward.

"He was one of the fellows at that dance, ma."

Mrs. Madden was satisfied.

"I think he's goin' to make you a grand, good husband, Lury. Your pa's brother Matt was a cook. D'ye know, Lury, yesterday, while he set here by me—while you was out lookin' at that flat he wanted you to see—he sung for me?"

Lury started.

"Did you—like it?"

She watched her mother closely. Her one dread of the fortnight had been—how would his voice affect her mother now?

"I guess I did! He sings beautiful—like your pa used to, 'fore the cold cracked his voice. I was that happy! Have you ever noticed that song about the waves singin' to the shore, Lury?"

"Yes, ma—I've noticed it."

The Last of the Pack

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE — THE ADVENTURES OF ROBERT EMMET DALY, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE HYENA OF HOWARD STREET

By John D. Swain

Author of "Billy Kane—White and Unmarried," etc.

IN the good old days when Howard Street was a thoroughfare to which Bostonians repaired for chop suey, bad whisky, lurid vaudeville, and mayhem, the Hyena picked up a pretty fair living from the leavings of the pack.

Jolly tars from the Navy Yard, near-pugilists, pedlers of questionable wares, a strange breed of women whose brows were as low as their heels were high, thirsty villagers from up-State, filled the narrow sidewalks and overflowed into the little cobbled street which began at a dime museum and ended abruptly at a lantern-jawed hotel where almost anything might happen, and frequently did.

To-day all is changed. The old Athenaeum is still there, and the tintype and rifle galleries. An ancient shop still displays its frenetic paper volumes and key puzzles and trick cigars and soft drinks. There are many sea grills and hot-dog stalls, mostly empty. Patrolmen no longer travel here in pairs, and staid citizens from Beacon Hill do not hesitate to pass through as a short cut to the North Terminal. *Sic transit gloria!*

In the Hyena's criminal youth, the little street was a roaring, singing, fighting section of Hades, known from Portland to Pawtucket as the only half-acre in New England where everything went but murder or arson.

The Hyena's monniker was not conferred by chance. He was no bold leader, no framer of big plays, no lover of strong-arm stuff. He slunk after the hard guys who were always ready to take a chance. He haunted the bars—and every other shop was a saloon in those days. Whisky was

ten cents a throw, and each man poured his own. Beer was a nickel the schooner, and the schooners were of the three-masted type. Lunch was free—fiery mustard pickles, the saltiest of herring and fish-balls, pretzels, clamorous cheeses, great pots of Boston's beloved beans, into which the wayfarer plunged one of the greasy forks standing in a bowl of water. It was good thirst-provoking grub, and to a certain degree hunger-quelling—the victuals of two-fisted men, who fortified themselves with it for the hazards of the night.

The Hyena was an expert lush-roller, and would trail a Maine lumberjack or a Gloucester fisherman for hours, patiently waiting for his hard head and sturdy legs to yield to the raw spirits which flowed on Howard Street. He was a fair pickpocket, and gifted at short-changing.

He slept by day, in a cubicle four rickety flights up a century-old house around the corner on Somerset Street, emerging in the afternoon and eating his one real meal of the day at Higgins's Oyster House. He had decent clothes, better health than he deserved, and money enough to keep himself comfortably intoxicated and to smoke ten-cent cigars and shoot craps with friends and chance acquaintances or buy a couple of orchestra seats at the Athenaeum, when his fancy took a sentimental turn.

No one in the world had anything on the Hyena for solid comfort. As to what took place more than three blocks north or south of Howard Street, it had not the slightest interest for him. Indeed, he would have stoutly maintained that nothing of importance ever did happen outside of his circumscribed home district.

One night he saw a new one pulled in Charlie McGulch's place. There was at that time a heavyweight pug who might, in the opinion of competent sport writers, have threatened the title, had he carried anything above the ears, and had he stayed sober for two weeks of conditioning. As it was, he put away a lot of pretty good men in the old Arena, and his admirers were many and thirsty.

The Hyena saw him one night when he was broke, standing beside a quiet and conspicuously sober man who had inadvertently paid for a mug of musty with a ten-case note. As the trained chimpanzee who was tending bar slapped down the change, the pug placed an enormous freckled hand upon it. Leaning down from his great height, with a ferocious scowl upon his marred face, he growled from the side of his thick mouth:

"Bo, is this your kale or mine? *Huh?*"

The other looked up and into the little red-rimmed, porcine eyes, noted the tremendous width of shoulder, the battered nose, the bulging chest of the questioner, and stammered:

"Why—er—I don't know—"

"Well, I know! Get me?"

And the devotee of the manly art swept nine dollars and ninety-five cents into his coat pocket, and called upon his henchmen to join him in a round. He graciously included the meek stranger, thus proving that his heart was as big as his biceps.

The incident made a great impression on the Hyena. You couldn't get pinched for pulling that stuff! Didn't the victim practically admit that he didn't know whether the money on the counter was his or not? Wasn't the barkeep there to corroborate it, if necessary?

New stuff—and admirable! Unfortunately, however, it seemed to call for a certain temperament which the Hyena realized he did not possess. Also, his physique was not sufficiently impressive.

The notion stuck in his mind all the lurid evening, and all the following one. He pitied himself as he frisked a drunken sailor sprawling over a packing-case up one of the many dark alleys leading off Howard Street. Only three dollars, and a fifty-cent watch—and running the risk of being picked up by one of the Joy Street flatties! It made him inattentive under the blandishments of a C Street siren, later on, at Yee Kee's suey joint. During the morning hours it thread-

ed his dreams up among the chimney-pots of his lodging-house.

II

OF primitive traits, none is older than the instinct to scare your enemy first and then lick him. Thousands of years ago, Chinese soldiers beat huge gongs and went into battle wearing hideous masks. Our native redskins never fought without first carefully disfiguring themselves with streaks and patches of war-paint.

Children—who are primitives—make faces at one another before hostilities. Gangsters walk stiff-legged, scowl ferociously, and hiss menacing threats from the extreme corner of their sneering lips. The late John L. Sullivan cultivated a fighting face, and had most of his opponents beaten before he raised his massive arms. His system is followed to-day by all thoughtful pugilists.

The instinct is even older than humanity. Certain caterpillars are able to assume a deadly look by erecting their hairs and humping their backs, thus deceiving the early bird. The humble mushroom occasionally saves itself from the eager epicure by wearing a brilliantly blotched skin, and masquerading as a toadstool.

The Hyena knew nothing of the psychology of the fighting face. He was a primitive type, reacting in the same way as the mushroom, the caterpillar, the noble redskin, and Mr. Sullivan. Gazing into the imperfect mirror before which he shaved each morning, and grimacing as he pursued elusive whiskers in the more inaccessible retreats of his somewhat battered face, he began to experiment.

His features were rather thin and flexible, his mouth wide, his eyebrows acrobatic. He achieved results which seemed to him pleasingly ferocious. He recalled certain close-ups of notable villains of the screen—bad men who flashed forty-fives in alleged Western melodramas; Apaches in French cabaret scenes; wife-beaters and escaped convicts. The possibilities of registering passion by flashing eye and out-thrust jaw and snarling fang burst upon him as he passed a soiled towel across his smooth jowl.

He finished breakfast at about two o'clock, and wandered over to the Common, pleased to note the effect of his ferocious mien upon the fellow creatures with whom chance threw him in contact. A lit-

the child looked up, stared round-eyed and round-mouthed into his face for a moment, and then fled howling to her nurse. She, a pert young thing whose French heels defied her prim cap, shrank back as the Hyena slouched past.

The benches were filled with unemployables—unkempt men sitting elbow to elbow, rarely speaking to one another, reading newspapers retrieved from refuse-cans, smoking, or simply staring fixedly at nothing. They awoke into restless discomfort whenever the Hyena brushed past them, singling out one here and there for a baleful glare, a malignant side-glance from half-closed eyes. They had nothing to lose, these derelicts; yet they cowered away from one who was so manifestly seeking prey!

With his ugly scowl, the Hyena had taken on a suitable gait—the stiff-legged walk of the great anthropoid ape, with hunched shoulders and outthrust chin. His cap was pulled well over one eye; his hands were thrust into his coat pockets.

A flatty followed him for several blocks, a puzzled look on his face. He was positive that a man who looked so entirely evil as the Hyena must be wanted down at headquarters, and he mentally ran over the brutal crimes of the past month whose perpetrators were still at large. He followed him clear down to Scollay Square, where the Hyena turned off toward the market district.

He was beginning to feel as tough as he looked. This is part of the psychology of the ferocious aspect. You bluff others—but you also bluff yourself. Never a pugnacious creature, he was conscious of a new stiffness in his spine, an impulse to take no back talk from anybody.

As if this arrogance radiated from him, passers-by began to yield him elbow room. Humanity is peace-loving, unless influenced by the agitator or by the mob spirit. Men and women give place to the aggressive one who uses his shoulders and hands, tramples on their feet, and forces his way to the front at ticket-window or bargain-counter.

Usually, that is. Of course, when two swashbucklers meet, one must needs give way.

The Hyena began to shoulder aside those he passed at street corner or on crowded curb. Most of them meekly stepped aside. A few scowled at him and muttered; but a glance at his now really sinister face stilled their protests.

Confidence was growing with every moment. Still, he hesitated to open his campaign on Howard Street. Its denizens were hard-boiled—and they knew him too well! They knew that he was only a Hyena, a skulker after the beasts of prey, one who exploited the maimed and the halt. His sudden transformation would be neither understood nor relished. That was why he was threading his way down to the market section, a region where he was almost unknown.

It was his custom to enjoy the free lunches which usually blossomed about five o'clock. At this hour the steamed clams, the fried oysters, and the little sausages were hot, the layout was fresh and various.

He selected Monahan's, on Union Street, a place he had never visited, and there for five cents bought a tall beer. Finishing it, he strolled over to the lunch-counter and speared a plump fish-ball with a greasy fork.

A certain etiquette governed the use of the free lunch. The rules were never codified, and varied according to the dispositions of the barkeepers; but when it was evident that the drink was merely a stall, and a square meal the main thing, trouble ensued.

Having eaten about one-third of the platter of fish-balls, a couple of fat dill pickles, and a hunk of cheese, the Hyena, never a hearty feeder, felt himself pleasantly filled. He was the only customer in the place; and his attentive eye had caught the restlessness of the barkeeper, a large and truculent person with a tin ear. This functionary scowled at the Hyena, and one corner of his harsh lips lifted to emit corrosive comment.

The Hyena paused in the act of impaling a slice of liver sausage, which he didn't want, and stared back at the Monahan custodian. In his face was concentrated a readiness to commit the seven deadly sins.

The barkeeper knew that look. It meant trouble—trouble prompt and prolonged. He was not afraid of any man. He was ready to waive all rules, and knew the pleasing habits of the gouger, the dusky razor expert, the free-kicking lumberjack; but, after all is said, everything becomes monotonous with repetition.

The barkeeper had tired of throwing bums and bullies and panhandlers out into muddy Union Street. What did it matter if this stranger hogged more than his share

of the free lunch? Monahan paid for it! He was confident that he could chuck this stiff out where better men had preceded him; but a careful study of the gormand's face convinced him that he himself would be mussed up in the process. Very likely he would get a skinned nose or loosened tooth as well as a soiled and torn shirt and a ruined collar. It simply wasn't worth while!

He grunted, shifted his hot little eyes, and went back to his endless task of mopping the old rosewood bar with a damp cloth.

The Hyena, now convinced that he had found the secret of prosperity, convulsively swallowed a fried oyster, and swaggered out. Here and there lights were appearing in dim shop interiors. Howard Street would be awaking, yawning, and showing its yellow teeth. He bent his steps toward home.

As aforesaid, he did not on this night attempt to capitalize his discovery there. He was too well-known.

A number of his fellows marked his expression, concluded that he must have an awful grouch on, and avoided him. He attached himself to a big heavyweight set-up who was flashing a roll up and down the street, buying a round for everybody in this groggery and that. He won a little loose change matching quarters with a couple of marines, at the Rexford Bar, and lost it shooting pool. He indulged in much idle talk with loafers devoid of any ideas creditable to a ten-year-old newsboy. He saw three fights, the arrival of much apparatus on a false alarm, the pinching of a New York dip by a couple of flatties.

He enjoyed himself, because this was the only home atmosphere he knew, and the usual home-like routine. And finally—at eleven o'clock—he drifted over to Mother Shannon's Hinky Dee, on Pitts Street.

III

WITH that modern curfew, eleven o'clock, the evil children who played on Howard Street drifted elsewhere. The bars reluctantly closed. Eat-'Em-Up Jack, the presiding genius of the Cushing House, threw out those who refused to leave, or whose flesh had been overcome by the spirits there dispensed. The Atheneum disgorged a smelly throng. Another perfect day had ended.

It was the custom of the hardest-boiled

to betake themselves over to the Hinky Dee, where good Mother Shannon sold ale as long as thirsts and wallets held out. Her patronage represented the cream of the district—the strongest of the strong-arm brotherhood, the crookedest of crookdom, the plumpest of suckers from logging-camp and small town. Nothing was done by halves. Fights were to a finish—and the finish might be the morgue. Trimmings were thorough; gold teeth were not overlooked, after pockets had been turned inside out.

The girls who hung out at Mother Shannon's were Amazons, equally ready with back talk or steel hat-pins. Their heads were solid, their legs hollow. They carried much of Uncle Sam's navy pay-roll in their soiled silk hosiery. The police tolerated the Hinky Dee because it was a handy dive in which to find any one they wanted.

It, and its like, belong to history along with the dodo, the wild West, and the plush-covered album. They served to mark periods of development, or undevelopment. The Hinky Dee was dirty, ill-smelling, and fascinating to those whose pet aversion was going home and to bed. Its habitués had no more morals than has the deep-sea clam, and not much more intellect. They foregathered here to drink ale, swagger, curse, fight, and make love. The strong and cunning preyed upon the weak and witless. It was a congress of panhandlers, short-card men, political hangers-on, stool-pigeons, homeless women, and souses.

The Hyena usually slunk in at about this hour. To-night he entered boldly, wearing his new glare, and casting a belligerent eye over the assemblage, most of whom were known to him in the underworld fashion which ignores parish registration. Not one of the patrons who glanced up as he kicked open the swinging door knew that he had been christened Robert Emmet by the tired woman who had died with a little prayer upon her lips that her baby might never be afraid or ashamed to look any man in the eye.

Well, Robert the Hyena was neither ashamed nor afraid to-night, in the Hinky Dee. He shouldered aside an unsteady marine, strode up to the little counter behind which sat Mother Shannon, and opened one side of his rather good-looking mouth.

"Gimme a—" he began, and halted. "How do, mother?" he continued, in a gen-

tlar voice. "Please gimme a half-old with a dash."

The capable old woman who ruled her untidy little kingdom as fearlessly as Boadicea led her British warriors, glanced shrewdly at him as she poured into a pewter mug the blend of old ale and porter for which the Hinky Dee was once famous.

"Chip on yer shoulder, Hyena?" she inquired.

"Nope; I'm aw right," he mumbled, his eyes straying.

Mother Shannon smiled. It was not a toothless smile, because she still retained three strong yellow fangs; but there was something even more deterring in it than in the Hyena's artificial ferocity. She leaned over her damp and sticky counter as she slid his pewter mug forward.

"Keep yer dirty little pig eyes offen the girrl, me bucko, or I'll mark ye for life!" she whispered, her words wafted on a warm current of onions and whisky which constituted her breath. "She's not fer the likes av ye!"

No more was said, and the Hyena meekly bore his ale to a corner table, forgetting to resume his scowl for the moment.

The girl to whom Mother Shannon referred—a glimpse of whom had arrested the Hyena's attention as he stepped up to the bar—was sitting demurely upon a stool behind the foggy glass case which held dreadful doughnuts, soggy pies, ham sandwiches, and a couple of boxes of poisonous stogies. She had not raised her own eyes from the heavy blue stocking she was knitting, and Robert Emmet Daly had been able to look steadily upon her for a few seconds.

Sheila McCoy had arrived in New York but two days before, coming on at once to her aunt and only relative, Mother Shannon. She wished to obtain a position as domestic, and could meanwhile have found no safer guardian.

The Spanish Armada brought strange wares to the Irish coast. Golden candelabra, rich velvet cloaks, jeweled swords, mellow flagons, figureheads wrenched from the bows of mighty galleons, carven chests—these have mostly been garnered into museums; but one enduring contribution remains. Here and there you may find, especially along the west coast, the blue-black hair, the haughty carriage, the deathless heritage of the *caballero*—the man on horseback—and of the grand lady with her air of awaiting homage.

Sheila had this Castilian touch, cruelly added to deep blue eyes fringed like gentians, and a face kissed to dusk rose by the salt breath of the Gulf Stream. She was plainly and cleanly clad in the homespun of the old sod; for Mother Shannon had not yet had time—or heart—to fit her out in the current Boston mode.

Her high-arched feet were cased in stout brogans, resting upon a rung of her stool; the hands which swiftly plied her needles were firm, brown, and frankly callused. They were spotlessly clean, ringless, capable. Her mouth was unsmiling, but seemed always on the point of dimpling into laughter; her nose was just short enough to appear a trifle disdainful. Her broad, low brow was serene as she sat quietly at Mother Shannon's shoulder, knitting.

If she gave no signs of uneasiness, she was none the less very much displeased with her aunt's establishment. It wasn't that Mother Shannon sold strong drink. They knew that, back in Ireland, and thought nothing of it; but at home Sheila had seen no such dive as this.

Most of the men-folk there drank whisky—the peat-smoked spirit of their ancestors. Her own father and brothers did so. If they got too much, they belabored one another with good, knobby shillelahs, and were thereafter better friends than ever. They drank at home, or in decent taverns, and went about their affairs. Now and then one might sleep beneath a hedge, and be none the worse for it. Nowhere had Sheila seen such a collection of foul birds as roosted in her aunt's place on Pitts Street.

Although, as has been said, she did not raise her eyes when the Hyena blustered up and, upon catching sight of her, lost for the moment his assumed character, she nevertheless had observed him with a swift and veiled appraisal. She noted that he differed from the others, and knew at once that his ferocious mien was only a pretense. She saw that he had yet some years' leeway before he should sink to the bloated, rum-blotched level of Mother Shannon's brood.

He had good features, a well-shaped head, a trick of wearing his cheap clothes with distinction; and even now a curious, wistful boyishness lurked in his eyes. He somehow reminded Sheila of the wild lads who used to prank it at the fairs back home, most of whom in due time settled down and

married pretty colleens and never came to any real harm at all. She sighed, partly at the memory, partly for the Hyena, and promptly forgot him.

So did he forget her, once he had taken a draft of his ale and looked around. Much was astir in the room. The Hyena remembered, and resumed his sneering scowl.

At the adjoining table three half-drunken sailors shot craps, bending low to read the dice with their bleared eyes. Close by, with sinister patience, four girls awaited the inevitable moment when the seafaring men should notice them. From time to time they sipped from half-empty mugs. Their eyes were old, crafty, primeval—the eyes of nocturnal hunters, used to reading men rather than books. There being four of them, one must be counted out on the coming show-down. Their coiled strength was reserved for this struggle for the survival of the unfittest.

The best-favored girl, who looked to be thirty and was really eighteen, wore a moulting feather boa over her grease-stained black satin waist. Other straggly feathers nodded from her broken straw hat. Rouge and powder failed to conceal the pimples which generously covered her lips and chin.

The Hyena gave none of them more than a passing glance, nor did he linger over the two whispering men who, with their heads almost touching, conferred in one corner. A sleeping longshoreman held him for an instant; but the sleeper's companion was awake, and watchful. A welterweight and his manager were celebrating a victory in the semifinals at the Arena that evening, and wasting the twenty-five-dollar stake in riotous living. A quartet of negroes from the South End were vocalizing about a sunny South which none of them had ever seen. Three of them were scarred by old razor duels. More women—old harridans come in to get warm, blind beggars with their make-up off, spending the nickels and pennies of charity.

At this moment chance seemed to offer the Hyena one of those morsels upon which he was ever ready to swoop.

One of the dicing sailors, in pulling a soiled bandanna from his pocket, pulled out an equally soiled greenback, which fell beside his chair. The Hyena noted it, and prepared to scoop it up. If the sailor became suspicious, he would fix him with his new forty-rod stare!

It was purely by instinct that he first included the near-by tables in a furtive glance. No one present would interfere with his pickings. Findings were keepings at the Hinky Dee. Mother Shannon asked only that nobody should start anything he couldn't finish; but the Hyena's eyes met those of the girl Sheila, and were held for an instant.

She was looking at him with a level, impersonal gaze from eyes as blue as alpine ice. It seemed to him that his assumption of ferocity was as transparent to her as if he wore glass clothes; and all the strength went out of his desire. The greasy bill still lay beside the sailor's chair; the eyes of more than one were now fixed hungrily upon it, and upon the Hyena.

He wet his lips with his tongue, feeling the frown smoothing out on his face, and stricken with a sort of moral paralysis.

After a moment the girl veiled her eyes beneath their long lashes.

"Oh, hell!" breathed Robert Emmet Daly.

He eased the front legs of his chair to the floor, and himself out of the swinging door of the Hinky Dee.

He tried to soothe his outraged feelings by picking a quarrel with the driver of a night hack; but his evening was spoiled, and after a little choice repartee he spat disgustedly and climbed the dark well to his lofty Somerset Street perch.

IV

SOMETHING was wrong with the persimmon physiognomy.

The system worked, but as a boomerang. The Hyena sowed scowls and reaped black eyes.

It was true that here and there he succeeded in terrifying some one, but the victim usually proved to be a poor derelict with empty pockets. Money is a great stimulant to courage. It leads the possessor to deeds of derring-do to hang on to it.

The Hyena made some horrible mistakes. There was a little bandy-legged Welshman with a name like an imprecation, upon whom he experimented one night at the Rexford Bar. Just how he escaped he never could recall with any clarity. He had to grope his bruised way home with half of an eye; and ever thereafter he had a distaste for men with more than two l's in their surnames.

His social circle shrank amazingly. No-

body loves a grouch; not even grouches can abide their own kind. Not only strangers, but such dubious pals as he had, eyed him furtively and crossed over to the other side of the street when his ugly leer bore down upon them.

One night, as he entered the Cushing House, Eat-'Em-Up Jack, the bartender, rejected his perfectly good money.

"Fer Gawd's sake take yer face out o' here! Fer every quarter ya spend ya drive away a dollar!" he bawled; and proved that he meant it by spitting on his hands and registering an intention to hurdle his own bar. The Hyena shuffled out, greatly depressed.

He sat one sunny afternoon on a bench upon the Common, thinking. It was hard work, because unfamiliar. Howard Street denizens do not think much. They are primitives, like the ameba, which are merely stomachs. The Howard Streeter was constantly seeking something wet or dry to put into his stomach. Such thinking as he did was concerned with his crude appetites. The ameba is perfectly adapted to secure the food that abounds in its environment. So was the Howard Street bum. His environment was a little more complex—that is all.

Creakingly, then, the Hyena began the tedious process of reflection. Something was wrong. What?

Despite his sullen face, he looked far better in one way than he had for a long time. His many fights had hardened his flesh and brightened his eyes. He had never been a sot; he drank because it never occurred to him not to do so. Everybody he knew drank.

His father had been a high-class mechanic in his day, but Howard Street had got him. Howard Street had killed his patient mother, when the Hyena was only a whimpering cub. It would get him, too.

Rather to his surprise, he found himself resentful toward it. What had he ever got from it in return? Enough to eat and drink, usually; a dry cot to sleep in; the smiles of women whose thick paint cracked in the process; lurid nights, sodden sleep, brawls, ignoble trickery.

It was only by chance that he had not done time, as practically all of his intimates had. At that, only the other night, a flatty had run him into the Joy Street station because instinct told him that a man with such a face must be wanted. A crib had

been cracked on State Street that day, and orders had gone out from headquarters to round up all suspicious characters. The Hyena had been turned loose, but not until they had mugged him, scowl and all. He had not been finger-printed, because there was no evidence against him; but manifestly a face like his belonged in the Rogues' Gallery.

His eyes, wandering aimlessly, fell upon a beggar seated two benches away. He was a fat man, elderly, and shockingly clad. His shoes had no laces, and his clothes were so far gone that their very patches were re-patched. Wisps of graying hair showed through his greasy felt hat. In some mischance he had lost all his fingers and thumbs; and upon the right stump was fastened a sort of wooden clamp, which he opened by bending his wrist, using the wooden leaves to pick things up with. About his neck hung a tin cup; and below it, a sign crudely printed:

I lost all my fingers, but I still got my disposition!

These details the Hyena took in abstractedly, before observing the fat beggar's face. At sight of it, his own unconsciously relaxed. It was impossible to gaze upon the mendicant's features and scowl.

It was a purplish face, and deep-bitten by the little wrinkles of geniality. The blue eyes were alight with good humor. The wide mouth seemed about to open in rollicking mirth. The very ears, outstanding and overlarge, were comical and somehow boyish and ingenuous. There was no prospect near by at the moment; it was evident that the fingerless man was warm with the spontaneous fires of his own cheerful reflections.

Fascinated by a sight familiar enough, since many beggars thrived along Howard Street, the Hyena watched this fellow for a full hour by the big clock on the old church on Brimstone Corner, which sentinels the Common. During this time many pedestrians passed by the beggar's bench; and only three of those who noticed his beaming face failed to drop something into his tin cup. The Hyena could identify, by their ring, most of these coins; and his estimate of the hour's tribute was three dollars and sixty cents—an astonishing sum, when multiplied by the hours of an ordinary working day!

Not once had the beggar whined a word

to attract alms; he had merely smiled, raked in the kale, thanked the donors—but not effusively—and from time to time emptied his dimes and nickels into a baggy pocket with a dexterous flip of his ingenious wooden hand.

Presently the fat one yawned, rose ponderously, and waddled past. Perhaps he was calling it a day, and was going to enjoy himself in whatever fashion a fingerless man may.

He paused at the Hyena's seat, smiled down at him, and murmured:

"Up against it, feller! I c'n stake ya to a—"

"Nix—I'm all right!"

He tried not to sound gruff, but habit was still strong upon him.

The beggar nodded pleasantly and disappeared around the big bronze fountain.

His senses sharpened, the lone watcher now began to take note of other little happenings in his vicinity.

Nowhere except in Venice are there so many and such tame pigeons as on Boston Common. On any pleasant day you may see them fluttering in hundreds about the feet of the boys and girls who feed them. They perch upon the children's heads, too, and hang with their little pink toes from shoulders and sleeves. The scene was familiar enough to the Hyena; but now, for the first time, he was aware of the smiling faces of the youngsters and of the grown-ups who watched them. They seemed to radiate a warmth as tangible as the rays of the sun.

It was not the heart of the watcher on the bench that responded to the smiles about him, but his rudimentary philosophy. He began to see that his dope was all wrong. What was more, he was filled with a vague surprise that he hadn't got wise to it before.

Smiles paid!

Who was it that discovered that the great American people dearly loves to be fooled? None other than P. T. Barnum; and all existing portraits of the great pioneer depict him with a smile that simply won't come off. What chance would he have had if he had scowled when he said it?

There were lots of things that could be said, and said safely, if one but smiled. Take the oldest recorded insult—the "fighting epithet." It is mentioned in the Old Testament. A man has simply got to fight, when he is on the receiving end; but

it is an old saying of the turbulent West that you can even get away with that, if you smile when you say it.

Take Lydia E. Pinkham, that old-time benefactress of her sex. Look at her face, on her comfortable bottles. Does it smile? It certainly does!

Do con artists approach their prospects with ferocious mien? Do the gentle book-agent, the seller of patent gas-saving devices and magic silver polish and dubious oil stock, permit the fixed and glassy smile to desert their features once during working hours?

The man who bids you name the shell under which reposes the furtive little pea; the race-track tipster; the professional crap-shooter; the predacious bar fly, seeking a drink or a trifling loan—smilers, every last man of them. Their frail sisters of the street smile. Everybody with anything to sell, or put over, or wheedle customers with, recognizes the smile as part—and a very large part—of his stock in trade.

Yet here had been the Hyena, thinking to overturn an ancient tradition and gain a livelihood by making people fear and hate him! His face had worn a scowl so long that it hurt him to grin; but he started to do so. A friendly passer-by gazed sympathetically at him, thinking that he must be suffering from toothache. He suggested oil of cloves.

Presently real amusement came to his assistance. His own monniker occurred to him. Hyenas were the only members of the animal kingdom, save humans, who gave expression to mirth other than by wagging their tails, purring, or similar uncouth means. But the hyena did not merely smile; he *laughed*! His mirth was probably due to the fact that he let the big beasts of prey do the rough work, while he sneaked up and stole as much as he could get away with.

Henceforth, then, Robert Emmet Daly would be the Laughing Hyena. He would grow fat and prosperous, and jolly his way through the world and its pockets.

There were no more smiles than usual this day in Boston. It was only that one takes note of things upon which his mind is set. The Hyena began to think about smiles, and, wherever he looked, smiles abounded.

Not a dozen yards away a little newsboy stood with a sheaf of evening editions under one arm. It was his boast that he could

guess what paper each prospect would select, eight times out of ten. When a man approached him, hand in pocket, the little chap would whip out a *Transcript*, or *Traveler*, or *Globe*, or whatever he sensed that his customer would probably prefer.

It is an old game among newsboys the country over. There are lads in Atlantic City who will distinguish the gentleman from Cincinnati from his Cleveland fellow as readily as they differentiate the New Orleans man and the Bostonian.

This small merchant upon whom the Hyena idly gazed was inexperienced. He guessed wrong about as often as he guessed right; but what was noticeable was that he never stopped smiling, and always covered his mistakes with a nimble wit.

"Scuse me, mister; I t'ought youse was a highbrow!" he said to one who refused the most scholarly of his papers.

And the pennies and nickels rattled in a small but steady stream into his ragged breeches pocket, while competitors who never smiled stood for long minutes without making a sale. It was plain that he had many regular customers among the throng which the near-by subway disgorged or devoured as the five-o'clock hour approached.

He was probably too young, the Hyena reflected, to make a deliberate effort to capitalize the smile; and then, again, he might be wise to it. You never could tell about these kids!

Money followed the smile—no question about that! The Hyena grinned as he noted that there were even more idlers grouped about a certain bronze statue that wore a smile, than around more ambitious works of art whose visages were serious.

He yawned as he grinned, feeling the call of Howard Street in his blood as the cool breath of sunset stirred the elms on the Common. He rose leisurely, as a man prepares to saunter down to his club, and turned up the Poet's Walk toward Joy Street. It was a relief to let his face relax. It is physically much easier to smile than to scowl.

V

HALF-WAY up the steep pitch of Joy Street, his ear caught the screech of gears as a small closed car skidded around the State House end of Mount Vernon Street. He leaped away from the curb as it lurched drunkenly toward him, the red face of its chauffeur with mouth agape, eyes bulging,

one frantic foot feeling for the emergency brake. Inside, there was a transient glimpse of a white-whiskered old gentleman bobbing about like a pea on a hot griddle. Then the car smashed into the iron railing of the Diocesan House, and with beautiful unanimity master and man left the vehicle.

The chauffeur, with the luck of intoxicated men, alighted upon his feet, and without even looking behind him sped on down the slope toward the Common. The old gentleman landed through the door, which he had wrenched open, fell full length and hatless almost at the feet of the Hyena, and did not stir.

It happened that there was no one within a hundred feet of them at the time. A group of shop-girls homeward bound toward Myrtle Street paused on the next corner, and screamed musically. The traffic officer on Beacon Street began to run toward them.

The Hyena knelt beside the elderly passenger. His quick glance took in the quality of his clothes, the cut of his features, the monogram on the elegant little car, the trim uniform of the fleeing chauffeur. The victim was breathing; a lump on his forehead indicated nothing more serious than a brief K. O.

Pickpockets designate in their peculiar lingo the various places in which men carry their money. Thus the inside waistcoat pocket is known as the "pit." Those who bank their greenbacks in their trouser-pockets are said to carry it "down south." The natural solicitude of a human being for his injured fellow did not in the least prevent the Hyena from noting the pleasing bulge which indicated that the old gentleman over whom he knelt carried his emergency fund "down south." The action by which he transferred it to his own "pit" was so quick and instinctive that it may almost be said to have preceded its motive.

Barely was it accomplished, when keen gray eyes opened beneath the bushy white brows, and with surprising suddenness the ancient one sat up. The Hyena tenderly assisted him to his feet, brushing from his coat the trifling dust and restoring to him his severe, flat-topped Panama.

The traffic officer, pad and pencil ready, arrived. The crowd that always rises from nowhere, at any hour or place when calamity befalls, pressed about them.

"The scoundrel was drunk!" The old gentleman asserted it truculently, as if ex-

pecting some one to dispute him. "He's a good driver, and I've had him two years; but I warned him the first time that I'd fire him if ever I smelled it on his breath again. Now I wonder what he drank! It didn't smell at all!"

The traffic officer began to ask the usual questions.

"Oh, bother! You can see the number for yourself; and I am John Endicott, of Marlborough Street. I'm making no charges, and my car has done no damage, so far as I can see. Young man, can you drive?"

"Sure!" smiled the Hyena. "Anything with wheels."

He had learned the rudiments from a shady night taxi-owner of Bowdoin Square, and had never held the wheel of any model worth more than three hundred dollars; but he knew surprising things about changing the identity of automobiles until their very makers would have hesitated to acknowledge them, and he could get speed out of wrecks that most high-salaried chauffeurs could not have started at all.

"Hop in, then, and drive me home. I don't propose to hold a reception here. Wait, though! Find out if she is disabled. Never mind about a license—I'll fix that up to-morrow. John Endicott, Marlborough Street—you have heard of me, haven't you?"

This to the traffic man, who had of course heard of him.

The aristocrat thrust his hand into his empty pants pocket, while the hand of the officer crept out automatically.

"Robbed me, too, by George! Just for that I will make a charge, officer. Albert Thompson, smooth-faced, thirty, weighs a hundred and sixty-five, when last seen was wearing a gray whipcord livery paid for by me. Driving a car while intoxicated, and robbing his employer. Maybe he wasn't drunk; might have staged the whole show to kill and rob me!"

The officer took down the details, pocketed a bill which Mr. Endicott produced from another pocket that the Hyena had not had time to discover, touched his hat, and began officiously to warn the bystanders to stand by no more.

The Hyena, meanwhile, assisted by one or two others, pushed the little car back into the street, ran his hands over her vitals, and announced that she had nothing worse than a bent mud-guard and a flat tire. A

minute later he was purring down Joy Street, around the corner into Beacon, and presently, at the signal of Mr. Endicott, tooled her gracefully through an ornate iron gateway beside a huge brick residence masked with Boston ivy and smelling of opulence.

He was smiling as he opened the door for the owner of it all and of a couple of blocks of State Street office-buildings. His smile was not assumed, but was the result of pleasing reflections. The comfortable roll in his "pit," the unfortunate Thompson, upon whose innocent though inebriated shoulders the guilt had been so conveniently shifted, the prospect of a reward, and the thrill of the unexpected adventure, all combined to produce a genuine and radiant grin.

John Endicott pierced him with his gray eyes.

"Thompson never smiled. I like men who smile—like to have 'em round me. What are you grinning at, anyhow?"

"Why wouldn't I grin?" parried the Hyena. "Life is a big game, and I like to play it."

"What's your name? Want a job?"

"Robert Emmet Daly. What kind of a job?"

"You can drive my car, if you stay sober and look pleasant! Call at my office to-morrow at nine."

From a waistcoat pocket he drew forth a gold and morocco case, and handed the Hyena a card with his State Street address. Then he consulted a thin platinum watch in another breast pocket, mopped his face with a fine linen handkerchief carried in his coat, and without another word strode away toward the house entrance, which was on the side rather than in front—a not uncommon feature of Boston mansions of the older type.

The doors of the garage rolled back, and a neat mechanic motioned to the Hyena to run the car within. He paid no further attention to him.

"Gee!" muttered Robert Emmet Daly, as he sauntered back toward the Common. "That old guy has more pockets than Heinz has pickles. Good stuff in 'em all, too—I'll say so!"

VI

ON a secluded bench under a beech-tree in the Public Garden the Hyena furtively rifled the bills taken from John Endicott's

pocket in the brief moment while he lay stunned before the Diocesan House. The roll contained two hundred and twenty dollars—a fortune, on Howard Street! The smile widened on his face as he divided and distributed it in various pockets, tucking one "sawbuck" in his left shoe as a sort of life-raft.

He did not play the free lunches this evening, but blew himself to a big feed at the Cushing House; and promptly at eleven he joined the unholy pilgrimage to Pitts Street.

Mother Shannon noted his new smile the instant he pushed open the swinging door of the Hinky Dee.

"Got over yer grouch, have yer, Hyena?" she commented as one bony hand reached for the ale tap.

He was emboldened to inquire for the girl, whom he had hoped to find behind her counter.

"She's worrkin' already, which is more than the likes av ye ever done," was all the satisfaction he got.

He grinned amiably, and threw down a two-dollar bill on the sloppy counter.

"Oh, I dunno! I'm being measured for a new uniform to-morrow."

"Is that so, now? Then I suppose it's got nice black stripes running east and west on it," hazarded the old woman.

"You oughta know the pattern," he retorted; "but mine's made plain, being a plain, simple man myself."

"Simple is right," agreed Mother Shannon. "Whin I see the uniform, I'll salute; and not before!"

The Hyena downed his half-and-half, thirstily observed by a despondent loafer who had also noted the newly acquired smile and the two-dollar bill. He edged closer.

"Say, Hyena!" he whined. "I've always been a good feller when I had the jack, ain't I?"

"You're knockin' yerself, Bud. By your own confession you ain't often a good feller. What 'll you have?"

Thus began a memorable evening.

The Hyena squared up innumerable past obligations, and stood drinks for many strangers as well. He was too wise to flash his roll, or to display a single bill of large denomination; but his unnatural prosperity could not pass unnoticed in a place like the Hinky Dee.

About two o'clock in the morning he was engaged in a game of galloping dominoes

with two strangers who had struck town looking for suckers. At half past three, refusing to bury his stolen talent beneath a napkin, even had such an effete trifle been known at Mother Shannon's, the Hyena had added to it some two hundred dollars more, representing the total capital of the two strangers.

The defeated players retired morosely, to wait around the corner for the smiling one to leave the Hinky Dee. That astute young man, however, was prepared for such a perfectly natural move on their part, and took his departure through an alley at the rear; and any outsider who can track a native Bostonian through his own jungle of crooked streets and rights of way could pass through the eye of a needle and not disturb the thread.

The Hyena awoke next morning singularly free from heavy-headedness. Such is the effect of a cheerful disposition!

He ate a disgustingly large breakfast of liver and onions, coffee and doughnuts, and promptly on the hour stood in the rather dingy State Street office of John Endicott, while the hairless mathematician who served there as private secretary took his name and vanished into an inner room. A moment later he was grinning at the magnate himself.

"Sit down. Have a cigar? All right—smoke a cigarette if you prefer the damned things; but don't do it in my garage!"

The old gentleman glared at the Hyena, waited an instant for an impudent retort, seemed disappointed at getting none, and continued:

"I'll give you thirty-five a week. The first time I smell rum on you, you're fired. George Rawson, my man of all work, will help you wash the cars. You'll drive. Not married, are you? All right; you can sleep in one of the rooms over the garage. Is that satisfactory?"

The Hyena said it was. He didn't really want a job, especially with four hundred berries in his clothes; but he thought the experience might be amusing until he tired of it.

"I've fixed up the license by telephone. Commissioner's a friend of mine. Had Thompson's revoked, and one issued to you. Take this card to the State House and get it. Then take this to the London Livery Shop and get yourself fitted to a uniform, cap, puttees, and gloves. Bring the small car around here at five sharp. That's all!"

It was noon when the Hyena emerged from the outfitter's arrayed in trappy whipcord and pliant leather.

The effect of a uniform upon man is profound. A solitary brass button elevates his soul at least a cubit. A Sam Browne belt may utterly change his disposition. Robert Emmet Daly, stepping high as he crossed the Common and Public Garden and turned up Marlborough Street, was a different man from he who had skulked through Howard Street by night.

He was good-looking, and for the first time he realized it. Lithe, erect, hard as nails, a smile beneath his vizored cap, he received many admiring glances from trim nurse-maids, and not a few from their mistresses. Moreover, his pockets were full of kale—and that alone gives a man an assurance that adds the finishing masculine touch. To the Hyena, there were two kinds of people in Boston—those who had money, and those who hadn't. As to how it was obtained, that was an utterly unimportant matter.

He was whistling "The River Shannon" as he swaggered past the iron gates of the Endicott house. The tune died on a shrill note as his astonished eyes beheld Sheila McCoy chatting with the man George, who was trimming the edges of the driveway.

She was keeping one eye upon a pretty child of five or six playing among the flower-beds, the other upon the leisurely working George. She glanced up as the Hyena drew near with embarrassment upon his smiling face. He was not anxious to have her recognize him as the shabby patron of the Hinky Dee; and yet, illogically enough, he hoped that she had not forgotten him. She looked straight into his eyes, smiling back at him as he removed his cap.

"I'm Daly, the new chauffeur," he said.

"We guessed it," grunted George, looking his uniform up and down. "Your room's over the garage, at the left of the stairs."

"What's the big idea? Have I gotta stay in it till I run over for the old man at five o'clock?"

Sheila laughed. George scowled. The Hyena grinned, and seated himself on the turf.

The child came skipping toward them, paused before the chauffeur, surveying him with the disconcerting gravity of infancy, which seems to see so much more than it probably does, and responded to his smile.

"Hello, new man! I'm Ellen," she announced in a friendly tone.

"Howdy, Ellen? You live here?"

"Uhuh. I own it. I'm Ellen Endicott."

"You don't say, now! And are you going to fire me, Ellen?"

She shook her head.

"Not 'less you're *impident* or get drunk!"

She danced away after a vagrant butterfly. Even George permitted a saturnine smile to light his face for an instant.

"She's the little tyrant here," Sheila explained. "She's the only one who dares talk back to the master. Her mother and father are both dead, rest their souls, and she's the only living relative her grandfather has got."

She nodded pleasantly, and followed her little charge, who was edging toward the gateway.

Left alone, both young men felt the instant antipathy that is born when two healthy males and a pretty female are involved, though none of them may be in love.

To the Hyena, whose mind had dwelt much on Sheila from the moment when he first saw her behind her aunt's bar, it was the culmination of his good luck to find her employed here. For the first time he felt something like panic lest he should prove unsatisfactory, and lose his place.

To George, a squat, thick-necked young countryman who was engaged to a girl in his suburban village, the Hyena was an eyesore, because he knew that the chauffeur outclassed him. He didn't want Sheila himself, but he didn't want her to like any other man of the establishment better.

The butler was old, the cook fat and married, the only other servant a middle-aged woman who washed dishes and made beds. George had been cock of the walk, and he looked askance at the swaggering stranger who stepped so high. To this was added a resentment that he should have to labor while the resplendent chauffeur lounged on the grass as a spectator. He glanced up, pausing in the steady *clip-clap* of his shears.

"You'll never be half the man Bert was," he prophesied darkly.

"I'll never be the sprinter he is," qualified the Hyena.

George snorted.

"Our garage ain't over big. I ain't sure it 'll hold you and me both!"

"You can easy find out by going behind it with me," the Hyena suggested.

"Yeah—an' get fired for scrappin'!"

"You won't get fired, George. If you ever fight with me, there ain't money enough to hire you to live on the same street where I work!"

With the Hyena's words came the recollection of his new creed, and the way in which he was violating it. Already his face was taking on its old-time scowl. With an effort he forced a smile, and offered his box of cigarettes.

"There's no cause for you an' me to start nothing on that guy's account," he said. "I don't even know him, an' I didn't steal his job, either. He trun it away!"

George scratched his head, and a match.

"Thasso," he agreed, puffing contentedly. "I was only kiddin', anyhow."

"I'll be lugging my steamer trunk up before it's time to get the boss," said the new chauffeur, anxious to show himself on Somerset Street in his new regalia.

On second thought he decided to drive over in the little car. It would be even more effective than the uniform itself; besides, were excuse needed, he ought to have a little practise learning the tricks of his new vehicle. The now mollified George agreed with him, hinting that the late Albert had needed occasional practise too, and that he had sometimes taken his friends along. The Hyena nodded comprehension as he trod on the starter and rolled away.

Nothing happened when at five o'clock he drew up before the State Street office to find Mr. Endicott waiting on the curb. The old gentleman was engrossed with some problem of high finance, and paid no attention to his new driver.

It did occur to him that they were a surprisingly short time getting home. Albert, sober, had been a careful man. In the Hyena's sketchy experience with cars, the first consideration had been speed. As to whether they moved on four wheels or two, or overheated their engines or wore out a shoe, that did not matter so long as they got to wherever they were going ahead of somebody else!

VII

As Endicott became accustomed to his new chauffeur's eccentricities, he secretly approved of them. There were no accidents; the fellow had a steady hand, a clear eye, and an uncanny instinct for just

nosing out some other fellow from a choice position, or slipping past a traffic officer the barest fraction of a second before he raised a warning hand.

Sometimes they did not escape a reprimand, and twice they were cited for speeding. On these occasions the old man's pomposity erupted in violent altercation. He always bawled out the Hyena when it happened; but the latter knew that his employer was naturally intolerant of rules and regulations, and felt that an Endicott of Boston was above them, at least in his home city. His storming amused the Hyena, who never answered back with anything but his famous smile.

The apoplectic old aristocrat and his grinning driver became noted among the traffic squad, who prayerfully awaited the day when something would really happen that would entail more than a simple fine, which did not bother Endicott in the least.

The Hyena grew to be quite fond of his irascible boss. As a result, remorse pricked him whenever he recalled the money he had stolen from him. Not that he even thought of returning it. Things were never done that way on Howard Street. Whenever a fellow in the Hyena's set felt that he had done some other guy dirt, he looked about to square himself by putting him next to something soft. The Hyena, true to his traditions, now prepared to do the handsome thing by Endicott, and to remove from his own sinful heart the burden of guilt.

It chanced, one night at the Hinky Dee, that he picked up a tip concerning a forthcoming scrap at the Armory, wherein one Silent Smith, a fair welter, was to lie down in the sixth frame of a ten-round go against an unknown. Odds were five to three on the silent one, who was a favorite with the public, and the talent anticipated a pleasant evening. It was this gilt-edged investment, in which he proposed to participate himself, that the Hyena generously outlined to Endicott one day when he was visiting the garage to grumble about the gas-bill.

"I know a cinch fight where you can bet a little jack and clean up," the chauffeur began.

"What? What's that?" barked the old man. "Me bet on a *fight*?"

"Sure! Why not? Ain't I tellin' you it's fixed?"

"Fixed? You mean the result is known

in advance? Are you suggesting that I should do something dishonest?"

"Aw, now, boss, fergit it! Ain't it just what you do every day on State Street—bet that a stock is going up, or mebbe down, because you know and the outsiders don't?"

"That is entirely different! It is a problem of financial or industrial conditions—a question of economics."

"Yeah, and this is one of sport. What's the diff? You simply take advantage of what you get wised to. I'm betting three hundred on the short end myself. I'm telling you Smith quits cold in the sixth. Let the bookies lose! They're mostly crooks, anyhow."

John Endicott stormed some more, and registered indignation. He kept his ears open, however, and found that much interest in the battle was felt among the brokers. The thing bothered him, as inside information always did. The finishing touch came when a fresh young grain-broker called him an old fogey when he admitted that he had never witnessed a ring fight.

"Just to give you a lesson, young man, I'll bet you twenty-five hundred on the unknown, with a side wager covering the price of two ring-side seats and a little dinner afterward!"

"You're on! This is just like finding money!" shouted the sporting youth.

When, as a result, Endicott won a little more than four thousand dollars, he was so exalted that he handed five hundred to the Hyena, without any explanation. None was needed. The chauffeur's smile emanated from a pure heart, which had purged itself of its larceny from the person. Together with the five hundred he had won by a similar venture of his own, he felt that virtue was indeed its own reward.

Fortune smiled upon the Hyena. He grinned back at her!

VIII

PHILANDERING, on Howard Street, is dynamic—an affair of actions rather than words. A certain amount of cheap talk goes with it, of course, but little poesy. It was the only sort of love-making the Hyena knew anything about; and as he had never been in love before, his knowledge came from observation rather than practise.

He and fortune were smiling on each other in nearly all that makes life a pleasant path; but he was playing in very hard

luck when he found himself head over heels in love with Sheila McCoy. In all sincerity he applied the only rules he knew; and they didn't work. The girl was friendly enough. She went to the motion-pictures with him occasionally, and less frequently took a spin in one of the four cars; but with rare exceptions baby Ellen was among those present.

This was natural enough.

Sheila's chief duty was to act as Ellen's nurse. The child was badly spoiled. She was the only living thing that Endicott loved; and they squabbled like two kids. Three or four had preceded Sheila, only to resign in despair, or to be peremptorily discharged because Ellen did not like and would not mind them. She did like Sheila, and there was that about the girl which restrained Ellen from any serious tantrums.

The Hyena observed that Sheila did not always take advantage of her opportunities to be alone with him. He had even known her to wake up the child from a nap, and fetch her out, to make one of the party on a sunny afternoon. He had to confess that his sweetheart did not prize stolen tête-à-têtes with him!

He was further hampered by Ellen's distinct preference for his society. She took to him. For that matter, he was immensely fond of the pretty, wilful youngster; but he was fonder of her nurse.

On the rare occasions when he managed to be alone with Sheila, he was oppressed by her refusal to be wooed according to the Howard Street code. She absolutely barred the strangle-hold, the scissors, and the hammer-lock. When he tried to kiss her, she left the mark of her firm little hand imprinted upon his brown cheek. If he so much as attempted to hold her hand, or to slip his arm unobtrusively about her waist as they sat in the dusk beneath the old ailanthus tree in the little yard, she calmly removed the offending member without comment.

In desperation, he was forced to resort to mere sentimentality; and here he made a miserable showing.

They had one of their rare interviews on a Sunday afternoon when Ellen had been taken for a walk by her grandfather. Honest George, finding that his fellow was genuinely in love, was generous in keeping himself out of the way. They sat on the bench beneath the solitary tree, enwrapped

in the serene calm of a Back Bay Sabbath. The Hyena sighed huskily.

"Sheila, dear, I can just see in my mind's eye a bit of a cottage with your sweet face at the window. 'Tis twilight, and myself comes down the lane toward the cot."

Sheila's luminous blue eyes turned softly upon him.

"Thinking you might get a handout, likely," she suggested.

"For my own supper that your pretty hands has been preparing of," he sternly pursued his vision. "I come to the gate. I see—I see two or three little tots waiting there to meet me—and a dawg."

"It's thankful I am for the dog. Belike you'll get no farther than the gate, then!"

The Hyena reddened, and his hands clenched.

"I'll get in if I have to kick his damned ribs in!" he growled.

"Whisht, now! That's a fine temper to be coming home in! Likely you'll knock over the childer as well, and then try to beat me up. How do you get that way—at the Hinky Dee?"

The Hyena stiffened on the hard bench.

So she remembered, after all! He had never been sure. Her unresponsiveness, the injustice of her remark, stung him to anger.

"You're a fine one to be throwing that in my face! Her being your own kin."

"You don't go to Mother Shannon's because she's my aunt," said the practical Sheila, "but because every other place has closed up!"

Footsteps crunched upon the gravel. Little Ellen left her grandfather to skip toward them and throw herself in the discomfited Hyena's lap, her fat arms about his neck.

"Sheila's been cross to you again! Naughty Sheila!" the child cried.

Her father paused in disapproval.

"Ellen!" he snapped. "Come here at once! You are big enough now to remember that you are an Endicott!"

The child made no move to release the embarrassed Hyena.

"Why, grandpa, you can kiss Sheila if you want to! I don't care—and she's pitty!"

The old gentleman cleared his throat violently, and beat a hasty retreat, his cane savagely punctuating his steps on the gravel. The male has small chance in such skirmishes.

The only consolation the Hyena could get was that at least he had no rival in his pursuit of Sheila, and that if the girl had really disliked him she would have refused to have anything to do with him. But so far as he could judge, the only real pleasure she took in his society was to make him utterly wretched!

Meanwhile, unknown to him, a real peril was gathering which threatened to deprive him of the sweet misery he derived from her mere proximity.

In Mother Shannon's bailiwick there was little that the old lady did not know, and nothing that she did not suspect. To her ears came in due time the news that her niece was accepting the attentions of one of her best customers, and that he was actually employed in the same household. That he had deliberately brought this about, she did not doubt for a moment. Nothing less would entice him to do any real work!

It accounted for several things. His cheerful smile, for one. Mother Shannon had not forgotten the effect Sheila had made upon him on the very night of the girl's arrival. It explained why he had spent so little time—and money—in the Hinky Dee of late.

Determined that no niece of hers should throw herself away upon a worthless character like the Hyena, the old woman journeyed to State Street and browbeat the hairless secretary into letting her enter John Endicott's private office. She had a plausible excuse, because Endicott owned the Hinky Dee, among other odds and ends of real estate.

Although both would have denied it with the utmost indignation, they were curiously alike. Each was obstinate, overbearing, impatient of restraint. Both were wealthy, judged by their respective environments. Both were choleric.

The interview was short and noisy, and in the nature of a draw. To Endicott, Mother Shannon told the little she knew about his employee, and the much that she suspected. Her landlord retorted that the worst thing against him seemed to be that he patronized the Hinky Dee; and she did not overlook the obvious retort that, as its owner, the Hinky Dee was good enough to swell his bank-account.

After she had gone, the broker was a little worried. He reflected that, contrary to his usual caution in such matters, he had

hired the man on impulse, and without demanding any recommendations.

On the other hand, he liked Robert Emmet Daly, and did not propose to discharge him merely because he had done such a perfectly natural thing as to fall in love with a girl whose charms were not lost on Endicott himself. Her success in managing Ellen had been a great relief; he did not wish to do anything that might offend her.

Ellen's partiality for the chauffeur counted strongly in his favor, too; although the old man was childishly jealous whenever the little one showed it before him.

The upshot of his meditations was a decision to do and say nothing, but to keep a wary eye on the new chauffeur, and forestall him in any of the criminal plots of which Mother Shannon had darkly hinted that he was capable.

The interview took place on a Thursday. The evening of that day was servants' night off in Boston. In the Endicott household, this meant that the butler, the *chef*, the maid, and the man George were off duty. The Hyena was free to go where he liked, but preferred to stay home with Sheila—that is to say, using "with" in its most optimistic sense. He hoped that, after seeing baby Ellen asleep, the girl would be willing to enjoy the balmy summer breeze with him in the pleasant side yard, even though she rebuffed him as usual.

Sheila did nothing of the sort. It may have been sheer perversity. It may have been a sense of shyness born of the empty house; for even the master had walked over to the Somerset Club.

For a little while after supper she and Ellen played about the flower-beds, treating the Hyena exactly as if he were a good-natured Newfoundland pup. Then they went inside; and shortly thereafter the lights went out below-stairs, while one twinkled from the nursery on the upper floor.

For a time the Hyena, mooning alone on the bench beneath the ailanthus, caught the murmur of Sheila's voice through the open window as she told Ellen stories of the "little people" back home. Then silence and darkness. The Hyena was intensely alone.

At half past ten he retired fretfully to his own bed over the garage. He was young and healthy, and had driven forty

or fifty miles in the touring car that day. In five minutes he was sound asleep.

IX

IN other than domestic circles, Thursday night was marked on the calendar. Among those interested was a group of yeggs who had run over to Boston from a house-cleaning in "Chi." For this particular Thursday night a number of jobs had been carefully plotted.

There is a good deal of primitive instinct among the denizens of city jungles. Those who prowl by night acquire a sort of sixth sense akin to that of the feral animals. Hence, when the Hyena awakened instantly from a profound and dreamless slumber, there was no identifiable noise, sight, or scent that was responsible. He simply found himself wide awake, and with every sense taut and expectant.

He had heard nothing but the usual gentle sounds of the region—the faint breeze that stirred the ivy clinging to the brick wall of the converted stable which was now the garage; decorous footfalls along Marlborough Street; the distant wails of one or two pedigreed Persian cats doomed never to indulge their ancestral right to exploit the night, and impatient of their silken cushions and certified milk; a far-away signal from a tramp steamer in the main ship-channel.

Unsatisfied, he crept to his window and looked out.

At first, nothing unusual rewarded his long, keen scrutiny. Then he noted a flicker of light from the library window. An electric torch was moving about within!

With an oath, the Hyena began to slip into shoes and trousers. There was no reason at all for Sheila to be using a pocket torch. If anything called her below, she would have turned the switch in the hall and flooded the room with light. Had any of the servants returned, they would have entered by the rear.

The Hyena glanced at the illuminated dial of his alarm-clock. It was a quarter past eleven. The rules of the house required the domestics, on their nights off, to be in by midnight. They were not likely to return a moment earlier.

He slipped noiselessly down-stairs, looked cautiously out of the sliding doors, and stole across the narrow yard, keeping in the blue-black shadow of the ailanthus. The light was burning steadily now.

He crept to the nearest of the library windows. It had been jimmied open; and within he saw two men occupied with something against the opposite wall.

A section of the built-in bookcase had been swung out—a section the Hyena knew nothing about—revealing a small circular safe door. Standing in profile, one man held an electric torch focused upon the dial, while another knelt before it, trying it with sensitive fingers. An open cloth kit of high-speed tools lay on the floor beside them.

Obviously, the Hyena should have slipped back to the garage and rung up the police. There was no possible danger to Sheila or Ellen; but every tradition of the watcher's life was against calling in the bulls. He had not yet been a member of organized society long enough to change his attitude. He prepared to handle the situation alone.

Instinct told him that the two intruders were high-class professionals. He knew that such men will kill unhesitatingly rather than be taken, or foiled; but without hesitation he grasped the window-sill and swung himself up and over.

He did not make any unnecessary noise; but the yegg who held the pocket light stood purposely so that one eye was on the window. He saw and perhaps heard the Hyena; and instantly, and in silence, he leaped across the floor.

He caught the Hyena as armies have sometimes been caught astride a river, unable to advance, to retreat, or to protect themselves adequately. With one leg still outside, with one hand grasping the sill, the Hyena could only half duck the swift blow of the steel jimmy the yegg carried in his right hand, while bearing the flash-light in his left. Crumpling up, he partly fell and was partly hauled inside. He had moved his head just enough to avoid fracture of the skull; but he was knocked for a row of shanties.

When he opened his eyes he was lying on his back, with his hands tied behind him and a gag in his mouth. The yeggs were calmly going about their affair with the little safe.

Outside, in the hall, a single mellow note proclaimed that the time was half past eleven. There was still half an hour before the servants returned, as the safe-breakers probably knew. They would simply leave the Hyena to be found where he

lay. Killing as a pastime had no part in the yeggman's creed.

There was sound sense in inactivity on the Hyena's part. He had a splitting headache. No peril hung over his sweetheart, asleep up-stairs. Old Mr. Endicott could afford to lose whatever he kept in his safe. For that matter, it would very possibly be recovered.

A month ago, the Hyena would have lain where he was and let events move to their logical conclusion. He was gagged, his wrists were bound. He had every excuse in the world; but somehow a change had been wrought in him. It might have been the girl Sheila. The habit of smiling may have exerted a subtle alchemy in his heart. The mere fact of having for the first time in his life a position of responsibility probably bore its part.

Whatever the reasons, the Hyena, defenseless and in pain, prepared to buck the great odds against him. He crawled to his knees. He stood erect.

The yegg with the torch heard him, and turned with a smothered imprecation. A nasty smile lifted one corner of the ruffian's thin lips. He thought that his victim was out of his head; did not even consider it worth while to blot him out with the jimmy. A sardonic sense of humor impelled him to amuse himself by knocking this gink out with a good punch to the jaw. With his victim's hands fettered, it would be as easy as toying with a punching-bag. Easier, indeed—because a bag snaps back!

He handed his torch to his fellow, who focused it upon the Hyena. Then, his arms extended, his fists clenched, he stole noiselessly forward, whispering unspeakable names at the helpless man who awaited him.

The Hyena had been bred in a hard school. He was not by nature a fighter; but he could fight when cornered, and his intimates had numbered many fair pugilists and notable mixed-ale scrappers. He knew most of the tricks of the ring, and all the foul ones.

His hard head had cleared, leaving only a dull ache. His quick mind had already settled on a device he had seen used more than once.

As the yegg closed in leisurely, knowing that his victim could not strike, or even cry out an alarm, the Hyena stood poised lightly on the balls of his feet, his head thrust a little forward, his hands desperate-

ly wrenching at obstinate knots. His eyes never left the cruel ones of the yegg.

Within striking distance, the crook set himself, measured his man, and let fly a hearty left straight for the "button"—the point of the chin. With serpentine quickness the Hyena turned his head, at the same time sidestepping smartly. The yegg, hitting nothing but air, fell clumsily against his shoulder.

He drew back with a snarl, and threw over his right. The Hyena slipped back, and to the other side.

Then the fellow lost patience, and came in flailing both arms in haymaker swings. It was the opening for which the Hyena had been playing—the chance to work that old, disastrous trick, much older than the prize-ring.

Instead of fading away or turning his head, he jumped in with his entire weight, dropping his head, and with its top catching the other flush in the face, with the full force of his leap and the added impetus of the yegg's attack. There was a soft snapping of bone and cartilage, of loosened teeth and bruised membranes; and the yegg, his face a mockery of anything human, slithered to the floor and lay like a sack of potatoes.

His fellow, the one holding the torch, did not understand just what had happened. He saw a gagged and bound man, as if by some miracle, knock out his confederate; and he realized that unless something were done, and done quickly and decisively, the evening was ruined.

He did not carry a gat. There was one on his stricken pal, but to use it in that quiet neighborhood would be folly. Nor did he propose to fool around with his bare fists. The torch in his left hand, the jimmy in his right, he advanced cautiously upon the waiting Hyena to crush in his skull, and be damned to him!

The tactics that had served against the first would not answer again—not against a man who had seen it worked, and who was armed with a steel bar. But Howard Street knows many secrets. From his memory the Hyena exhumed one of them.

The second yegg took no chances—or thought that he took none. He moved quietly, his eyes on the Hyena, the steel rod balanced in a hand well used to the manipulation of any sort of black-jack. With it, though he might miss the first time, he was safe, because his method of attack

did not lay him open to a butt from that bullet head.

The Hyena stood differently now, as the other might have noted if he had been trained to observe such details. His weight was all on the left foot, which rested flat. His right toe barely touched the floor, a little in front and to one side. And just as the steel bar rose in a feint, that right foot, toe extended, swung out from the hip and caught the yeggman's shin—not at the knee, or the ankle, where the bone is thick; but midway, where it tapers to knife-blade thinness.

There is a parry for this stroke, as for every known attack. Howard Street has learned this parry, which is as deadly as the kick itself; but the crook did not know it. He was of the aristocracy of the criminal world; with street brawls, barroom rows, he had nothing in common. He went down with that most agonizing of wounds, a broken shinbone.

His will was not sufficient to choke back a scream of pain; but he mastered it almost instantly, and began to drag himself toward his inert comrade.

The Hyena guessed at once that the first man had a gun, and that the other was going for it. As he had seen jugglers do in the Old Howard, he threw himself upon his back, rolled up on his shoulders, legs in air, and slipped his arms beneath. A quick bending of the knees, and his hands were now in front instead of behind. He tore madly at the knots with his teeth.

Presently, just as the yegg was fumbling in his pal's coat, the Hyena wrrenched one hand free. Most of the skin came with it. Blood poured from it as he raced over in time to beat the yegg to the gun, and thrust it into his pocket.

X

SUDDENLY the room was blazing with light. The transition from the beam of the little torch which the yegg had managed to hold through it all, to the glare of many incandescents, was blinding. It was some seconds before the Hyena could see, pale and wide-eyed in the doorway, the girl Sheila, staring at the battle-field.

Behind her, clinging to her white gown, was the little Ellen. The child came toward the Hyena, her eyes still heavy with sleep, her lips beginning to whimper.

Conscious of his bloody hand, and of the fright that a sight of it must give the little

girl, he thrust it into his trouser-pocket. He felt the warm dampness seeping through the lining.

"S'all right, honey," he mumbled. "Just a game we been playing here. An' I won!"

She stopped whimpering, looked interestedly at the two fallen men, and smiled.

"Play it over again, so Ellen can see it!"

The Hyena smiled palely.

"Some other night, kid!"

His head was beginning to feel light and floaty. He saw Sheila as in a dream. He heard the rasp of a key in the hall door, beheld John Endicott, with eyes popping in astonishment, as trivialities that he would forget when he waked up.

The curt words of the old gentleman roused him.

"What is your hand doing in your pocket?"

It was an idiotic question; but the spectacle presented to the master of the house was unusual—Sheila and Ellen, silent onlookers; two rough strangers crumpled on the floor, one inert, the other groaning and tossing; his safe door exposed; the new chauffeur half-clothed, disheveled, a cord dangling from one hand, the other thrust deep into a pocket.

Every suspicion roused by Mother Shannon rushed to the surface.

"What is your hand doing there?" he asked again.

The Hyena withdrew it slowly, a puzzled frown on his face. He gazed at its bloody surface as upon the hand of some one else.

"Oh, I remember!" He smiled. "I didn't want Ellen to—"

His eyes closed, and he swayed a little on his feet.

Then a miracle took place.

He stood in a garden wherein bloomed one thousand Killarney rose-bushes. From each bush a green canary sang "The River Shannon." Soft arms were thrown about his neck, holding him up. Warm lips were pressed against his own. He heard a voice.

"Sure, and see the smile of him! He fights and smiles at the same time, like my father and brothers! He is my own kind—my own brave laddie!"

The Hyena opened his eyes. He was drawn back from the frontier of unconsciousness. He saw only Sheila's face, and that obscurely, because it was crushed against his own. He heard only her blessed words.

The occasion seemed to demand some speech from him. He ought to say something. What was it the old man had asked him?

He opened his lips; but no words came from them. No ideas formed, save one—that Sheila McCoy's lips were his, and by her own will.

So he merely smiled!

THE END

THAT'S MARJORY

WHEN wintry skies are dull and gray
And wintry winds blow chill,
Let those who may deride the day,
Let grumble those who will.
I watch a casement o'er the way;
The curtains part, and see—
The sunbeams play December's May;
That's Marjory!

When autumn rains drip from the sky
And drench the little town,
Let others sigh with rueful eye,
Let others fret and frown.
We walk abroad, my sweet and I;
Love bears us company;
The clouds drift by and sunlight's nigh—
That's Marjory!

R. H. Barbour